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SO YOUNG, MY LORD, AND TRUE.

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SO YOUNG, MY LORD,
AND TRUE.

A Novel.

BY
CHARLES QUENTIN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1878.

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PRINTED BY TAYLOR AND CO.,
LITTLE QUENEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS.

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IN THE PAST.



AN autumn evening. The west wind blowing softly over yellow corn-fields and golden-tinted trees. All nature silent with the consciousness of perfected life. A tranquil moonlight. The sky pure and soft, looking down contentedly on the earth (as a mother on her child), which her just smiles and frowns have beautified and matured.

Two human figures in the quiet scene. One, a woman's, stretched on the green grass, which is crushed in her fall, lying motionless in her light evening dress. The other, a man's, moving swiftly away with averted face, the features set cruelly by the fixity of passionate purpose with imagined justice of cause.

Stunned or dead, what mattered it to the blind rage and murderous jealousy which struck the blow? The lying lips had been silenced—and if for ever, she would curse no other life!

This was long ago; but does time bury such deeds, or man's punishment end the story?

CHAPTER I.

“ A MAIDEN FAIR TO SEE.”

THE schoolroom of Madame Vigier's *pensionnat*, in Brussels, was doubtless the perfection of a schoolroom. Rows of books of an unvarying whitey-brown complexion, maps of a severe type, numerous doors, through one or other of which a mistress could always enter unexpectedly to pounce upon the unwary. Nothing whatsoever in the furniture or the decorations to attract the eye, or suggest one idea to the mind of the pupils, or in any way mar the uniformity of thought, habit, and deportment, into which it was the pride of Madame Vigier's life to mould the lucky flock committed to her care. One of this flock was on the 20th of May, 18— sitting alone in this long, bare, dreary room, and had evidently refused to be moulded to the proper pattern. Something had plainly gone wrong or Ada St. George would not, at this hour, have been sitting with a book before her instead of taking a decorous and highly lady-like walk with her schoolfellows. Ada's attitude was scarcely industrial. She had tilted her chair back on its hind legs, and clasped her hands on the top of her head. In that position it was not possible for her eyes to be brought to bear on the book which lay open on her lap.

On a warm summer's day it has a wonderfully sooth-

ing and resting effect, that slight swaying motion conveyed to the chair by the foot resting on, or rather tipping, the ground, and provided the legs and back of the chair at the point of union are of unimpeachable strength, the fascinating amusement may be pursued with much enjoyment and at considerable length. But to the simplest of mundane pleasures there seems to be some drawback, and against this of chair-tilting the feebleness of chairs in general is a perpetual protest.

Sublimely unconscious of danger—which, at this early stage of her life, might have been predictive of her future character—Ada, in this delightful but precarious situation, indulged in many a dream. From these delights, alas! she was recalled by a crash and an ignominious roll upon the floor. As soon as she had picked herself up, which she did quickly enough, she acknowledged her misdemeanour by a positive peal of laughter, which echoed through the bare room and made such a noise that it frightened her into stopping herself, and reminded her of the possible approach of Madame Vigier. She began after a while to contemplate, with rather a rueful face, the broken spine and dislocated legs of the chair, and wondered what her respected mistress would think she had been doing. All this was so exceedingly depressing to Ada's mind that she was forced to change the current of her thoughts by looking out of the window; so she twisted the blind on one side for that purpose, and stood looking on the stir and life without. All the sights and sounds were familiar to her now. The little carts full of brass pots, drawn by those big, patient-looking dogs; the long awkward waggons, laden with hay or barrels, passing lazily along; the

ceaseless chatter of the servant girls, who, going out with messages, never lost an opportunity of a word with their friends, though it might be screamed across the street as they hurried along; and over all these was that white glare of light which is never seen in England. A soldier's funeral passed, whose approach was heralded by jerky blasts on a horn, which sounded more like a *réveillé* than the solemn announcement of his last slumber.

It was curious to see the mobile face of this girl as she watched the procession pass, to see the changing expression of her eyes as with swift imagination she pictured his fancied life; his military pride and ambition; his gay dare-devil courage; his jests and good comradeship; the quiet thoughts of home and love, at which his face grew grave and beautiful; and last of all the still, fixed features which lay there beneath the black pall, the empty helmet and trusty sword.

The funeral had gone by in a minute, and two *gamins* who were playing in the street enlivened their game by whistling the same jerky bugle call, as if it were full of amusing associations. Ada's interest was quickly transferred to them.

Is there any part of the civilised world where "hop-skotch" has not penetrated, and does not present undying charms to the juvenile mind? The *gamins* clacked about in their *sabots* with marvellous agility. For a while their game went swimmingly, but presently there was a dispute, their voices rose with their tempers, and the older and bigger boy—after the not unusual manner of age and strength—began to bully the little fellow, and wound up by striking him on the head and upsetting him on the pavement. The window at this point

flew open, and the bully was surprised to see an indignant demoiselle, who told him wrathfully that he was a "méchant garçon; que c'était infâme de maltraiter ainsi un bébé!"

The extremely courteous and elegant reply, in which the contempt of the *gamin* found vent, was fortunately lost upon Ada, as her attention was entirely taken up by the entrance of Madame Vigier, and her much scandalized expression of countenance.

"Fermez la fenêtre de suite, mademoiselle." Thereupon followed a lecture on the enormity of her conduct.

"Did she know how *inconvenable* it was for a *jeune demoiselle* to join in a vulgar street-quarrel? Would it ever be possible to teach Mademoiselle St. George what was *comme il faut*?"

Ada listened silently, but with a lurking glance of mischief in her eyes. She did not seem much impressed with her own wickedness. On these occasions she was wont to indulge in unavailing regrets that she had not been born a boy. A caning seemed to have charms compared with being preached at, and any amount of Latin exercises appeared preferable to being told what was *comme il faut*.

Madame Vigier might well despair of making Miss St. George conventional and dignified; yet there was a certain sort of grace about her which was the more aggravating because it was against all rule, and could not be ascribed to school-training.

Madame Vigier's awful eye was at last brought to bear on the mutilated chair, and then upon the culprit. These glances had to be carried on for some time before she could find words to express her astonishment.

"And this, mademoiselle," she said with truly tragic

effect, "this, I suppose, is your *chef-d'œuvre*, may I ask how you managed it?"

Ada proceeded to explain the accident hurriedly, and seeing an incredulous look on the mistress's face, was so anxious to prove it possible that she would have illustrated it by taking up a similiar position on another chair had she not been prevented.

"It matters very little to me," said madame, in contradiction to her inquiry, "whether you broke it by sitting in a manner a *gamin* might do—with which class you seem to have much sympathy—or deliberately destroyed it from temper; but I am glad to think that *monsieur votre père* means to withdraw you from my institution, as otherwise I should have been obliged to request him to do so."

Thereupon Madame Vigier stalked out of the room to make an entry of *dédommagement* in her account-book, and left Ada feeling that some one was in the wrong, and strongly inclined to believe that it was Madame Vigier. Ada was not long alone. Presently Mr. Westbury, the English professor, came in, and Ada hailed the interruption with delight. He was a man between forty and fifty; calm in face and manner to a degree that seemed cold, but capable of most varying expression when roused to enthusiasm. He looked a scholar, every inch. His thoughtful, deep-set eyes, his thin intellectual face, told that his days had been spent amongst grave companions, and with the noblest and best of their thoughts did his mind assimilate.

Ada had always worked well for Mr. Westbury, and they were fast friends. One day she had expressed a great wish to learn Greek when he had been talking with enthusiasm of some beautiful classical tale, and he

offered to teach her. The lessons could only be managed on half-holidays and on Sundays, but they were always given and received in earnest, and Ada, having more than ordinary intelligence, teacher and pupil enjoyed them.

“In a scrape?” he asked, smiling.

“Yes, a sort of double one,” she answered, pointing with a not very penitent air to the unlucky fragments of the chair.

He laughed a full hearty laugh, such as one hears from those who laugh rarely.

“And the other offence?” he said.

She produced ‘Little Dorrit’ out of her pocket.

“I read this most diligently during Monsieur Dubois’s class, and made some foolish answer to a question in French history.”

“Naturally! After all it was a better way of passing the time than learning from Monsieur Dubois. If there is any professor who can extract the heart and life out of a subject and present it to his pupils a ‘dreary dust-heap,’ it is that choleric Frenchman.

“But about the chair,” he added; “how did that happen?”

“I finished ‘Little Dorrit,’ before I began this objectionable French history, because, you know, it is bad to try and do two things at the same time, and as long as I was wondering what would happen to ‘Little Dorrit’ I could not care in the least what happened to Philippe le Bon. Then, when I had ended the story, I tilted my chair back and began to think about it all; and *that* is what took place!”

“And there is to be no Greek lesson to-day?”

“No. I must finish this detestable French before supper.”

“Do you know that school will be over for me too at the end of this term?”

“You are not going to teach any more?”

“No, thank goodness! I hope to forget a good deal of my experience as professor, but not my only really intelligent and conscientious pupil.”

“How proud I feel! But shall I never have an opportunity of seeing you again?”

“Perhaps not. I am a bookworm, and you will be a gay girl going out into the world and enjoying yourself.”

“I don’t know about going out into the world, as papa and I live in the loneliest place you ever saw.”

“Wherever you are I would like you to remember that, if you happen to be in any difficulty and I could possibly be of use, I shall always be ready. It would be the greatest pleasure to an elderly and lonely man like me to be in the least degree helpful to a young girl. Sometimes it happens that relations are a bore when a friend can be of use.”

Perhaps Mr. Westbury’s interest in Ada St. George might be simply explained by saying that she was beautiful, and he was not too old to be attracted by her beauty; but, taking the word in its ordinary acceptation, that would only be a half truth. Beauty is most rashly talked about, for it is too subtle for words. It lives in a smile or a glance, and is gone on the instant. It shows itself in the quick movement of sympathy and helpfulness; in the noble expression born of a generous impulse; in the worn quietude of patient endurance; and even when, in one or all of its many developments, it dwells so often on a human face that it leaves its impress for life, then it will only be by a

mind refined and hallowed in like manner that its presence will be truly and reverentially acknowledged.

Mr. Westbury, an earnest worker and simple-hearted man, was drawn to Ada by finding her in earnest about most of the things she did, and his offer of service was merely a homage to the qualities which distinguished her from her fellow students.

It was not possible to Ada, in her happy girlhood, to imagine any time when there would be need for her to trouble Mr. Westbury, but she was flattered and touched by his kindness.

"Thank you," she said; "I shall think of you always as a kind of fairy that I may call for when I am in a scrape. Suppose you can't get me out of it?"

"That is more than probable, but you will admit it is a comfort for some one to try. I will make another promise,—I shall always try first to help you in your own way; when that fails, I'll try my own plan."

"As a pledge of my helpfulness," he added, "I should like to give you this old edition of Dante, if I may."

She thanked him with a pretty glow of surprise and pleasure on her face and said, laughing,

"Is it as a prize for good conduct?"

"Decidedly not. You could not lay the slightest claim to it on that score."

"Now, being a professor, you ought to give me advice about my studies before you go. Shall I burn all my books when I reach home?"

"You might as well if you don't care for them; but I believe you do."

"I care about some very much, but I should dearly

love to make a bon-fire of a few, this French History for instance."

"With all my heart," said Mr. Westbury, turning it over contemptuously with his finger. "I regret to say that many school histories are such dreary misrepresentations of facts that they could not meet a better fate. Now I'll give you a most serious piece of advice. Do not give up study, for you understand things better than most young ladies, and a time will probably come when you may find that all you have taught yourself will make the days brighter than anything else can make them."

"Yes, but I mean all the days to be quite bright and nice always."

She felt as if that last rather gloomy sentence of Mr. Westbury's required contradiction.

He smiled at her childishness, and said gravely,

"To know, and know, and evermore feel the depths of the unknowable, is the chief way of making the days what you call 'bright and nice.'"

From which you may perceive that a scholar's conception of the pleasures of life differed somewhat from that of a young girl just leaving school. Ada looked at him for a minute with a puzzled expression in her eyes, as if she were trying to understand this view of life, but the effort failed, and she laughed.

"It is hard for a young girl, with a happy home and all life before her, to think of work as the chief good."

"Very," she said emphatically, "especially when the word is associated with idiotic French histories, and silly pieces of music which tire my fingers and please no one. When I studied for your lessons, or read Italian,

or beautiful things in English, I did not think that 'work' at all."

"True work is pleasure often, but it is not always easy to do, and sometimes the things we do with the greatest pain are the best things."

A very serious look came over her bright face.

"I suppose I take things too lightly, but I cannot help it. I know there are many hard lives and sad lives, and I am really sorry, but they seem so far away, I do not think much about them. I know it is very babyish to fancy that everything must be bright because I am."

"And," she added hesitatingly, "you are very kind to talk to me like this, and make me feel that I cannot always be a child."

She looked very gratefully at Mr. Westbury, and exalted him into quite a beneficent person.

"I am not at all sure of that," he said, smiling. "I fancy you'll find it out for yourself very quickly; however, I take sufficient interest in my pupil to wish two things—that you should not be idle and frivolous because you are a grown young lady, and that you should keep my address and write to me if I can ever be of use to you."

"Will you write to me sometimes and remind me?" she said eagerly, her face losing its solemn expression entirely, and being much fascinated at the prospect of a correspondence with a clever man like Mr. Westbury!

He shook his head.

"I think not. I am going to be a very busy man. I shall live with my sister, and spend the rest of my days in writing. I shall not have time for letters; indeed, I do not think they are much good to any one."

He got up as he spoke to leave the room.

“It was stupid of me to ask you,” Ada said timidly, “and it is very good of you to let me write if I should want anything. Thank you,” she added as she gave him her hand, “I shall not forget.”

CHAPTER II.

SCHOOLGIRL FRIENDSHIP.

DOES any one know why Brussels is supposed to be a good place for education? Or why very careful papas and mammas, who investigate with inquisitorial severity all the possible faults and perfections of an English school, swallow with a credulity quite beautiful to witness, all accounts of a foreign "*Pensinnat?*" This rather leads one to the inquiry whether the one millionth part of the civilised world could give a sensible reason for most of the things they do? I think not, but we must take the reasons they offer us; and that which Colonel St. George would probably have given for placing his only child at Madame Vigier's was that some one had told some one who had mentioned it to a friend of his, who had informed him that Brussels was a capital place for a girl to be educated; and as Madame Vigier seldom took any English girls, there would be nothing to prevent his daughter from acquiring French most thoroughly there. So for three years Ada had been completing her education under Madame Vigier's fostering eye. Ada had not taken root at all in this soil, but she had thrown out one slender tendril which had fastened round her only compatriot, Kate Southcote. As school-girls are admitted to be much too foolish to account for their likings or dislikings, we need only conclude this friend-

ship to have sprung up, on the broad principle of giving and taking. They shared the same room, and Kate was not indifferent to the advantages of an undue proprietorship therein. A longer spell at the mirror, the assistance of a skilful, tasteful companion, occasional words of admiration—which to Kate's mind were as necessary as daily food—all these things were readily given in exchange for a few friendly and affectionate expressions.

A little kindness goes a long way ; one does not require to live to old age to learn that. Those who have the lowest possible estimate of human nature find that a little apparent affection skilfully laid out will gain their ends as well as anything else, and the worldly, in employing such means, tacitly admit the existence of a susceptibility to tenderness in the human heart which they would sneer at in words. Even the best of us are scarcely scrupulous in the use of our kindness. We begin very early to know its power. A child is kind to its play-fellow to win a triumph or a pleasure for itself. The little one that is worked upon is often laughed at and thought a fool, yet the simple, warm heart that could see no double intent, no evil lurking under the apparent good, is—by a right mind—not to be pitied, but envied. The girl or boy of intelligence will soon learn that many good-looking acts are not what they seem, but in exact proportion to the purity of their own souls will be the unwillingness with which they will relinquish their belief in the good motive of any act.

Ada, not "getting on" with the Belgian and French girls, thinking them affected and old, and not showing a laudable desire to imitate them, felt the need of something to admire, and exercised her imagination on Kate Southcote. She thought her pretty and clever, and all

that could be expressed in schoolgirl parlance by the words "a dear." She received with a sort of awe the announcement that her friend was engaged, and looked upon herself as a most privileged person to be the recipient of confidences on the subject of "Charlie!" It was slightly humiliating to Ada, at that witching hour of the night when the candle was put out and these disclosures took place, to find that she could not offer any corresponding revelations, and that after searching as diligently as possible through the recollections of the past years, her memory as regards courtship was a melancholy blank.

Sometimes Kate's apparent appreciation of other men's admiration besides Charlie's—as evinced in her confidences—would surprise the ignorant mind of Ada; she being, as her friend often remarked, "a baby," and thinking in her simplicity that love was a poetic sort of attachment only to be given to one person in the wide world, and that to the end of life. So strong was this girlish idea of Ada's that she generally made herself quite comfortable by thinking that Kate was only jesting, and as this love story was the first known to her in real life, she dressed it up in the prettiest garb imaginable. Sometimes Ada's belief in her school-fellow's perfections and general sweetness of character would receive little shocks which teased her. One such was given as they chattered together one night a short time before they left school. Ada was as usual brushing Kate's hair with the utmost good will, and the latter was carrying out her part of the give and take system with quite equal enjoyment. Ada had just invited her friend to Oaklands in the summer, and as this visit had been a long-cherished plan of hers, it was rather a blow when Kate, instead of

giving a gushing acceptance such as the schoolgirl heart anticipated, began to make inquiries about the attractions of the place.

"What do you do with yourself all day at home?" she asked, waiving the subject of the invitation.

"Quantities of things," Ada replied in a tone of infinite content.

"But you say you do not see people?"

"Not many," Ada said laughing. "It is quite a journey to get to our nearest neighbour, and when we go to see any one we have to stay hours, and it is such a bore. Papa does not say so, but I know he hates it as much as I do."

"Dear me," said Kate, rubbing her eyes and yawning. "What a queer girl you are! I suppose there must be quite forty families near us, and visitors are in and out all day long. I should die of the blues if I were in your place. How dull you must find it always!"

"Not a bit dull; I am as happy as possible. There are so many things to be done this summer. The whole of the rose-garden is to be laid out under my own special directions, and a beautiful bower to be made at the end of it. Then old Sykes is training a horse for me, and says I may ride it when I go back."

The fascinations of Oaklands did not seem to present themselves to Kate Southcote in a very forcible light.

"It is very nice to live in a pretty place and have horses to ride, but I never enjoy things alone. If I had a country place, I would have it full of visitors from one year's end to the other. 'A lodge in some vast wilderness' is not at all my style."

"So you do not care to come and see me?" asked Ada hastily, wishing to be sure of the truth of the matter, "You think it would be too stupid?"

“Not a bit stupid, dear,” Kate answered with that sweetness of manner which promised to make her what the world deems a charming woman. “It would be great fun to go to you and talk over old times, but I shall not be able to manage it. We are to have a lot of people to stay with us during the summer, and Charlie’s mother wants me to pay her a visit.”

“Then when shall we meet again?”

“I don’t know, some day or other. Perhaps when we are both married and done for!”

There was an airiness in her tone which seemed cold to Ada, but she swiftly concluded it to be natural that Kate’s affection should not be quite equal to hers, Kate having many friends and she having none, but of course Kate was very nice all the same. As all Ada’s reflections tended to this conclusion, it was doubtless entirely satisfactory.

“Three days more and then school is done with for ever, thank goodness,” Kate said fervently as she coiled up her hair, which Ada had brushed with much care.

“I should not have disliked it so much if all the girls were not so terribly grown up,” said Ada with a wry face. “It is a dreadful trial never to have had a romp for three years. It has made me feel as old as the hills. I don’t believe I could roll down a grass bank if I were to try.”

“What a child you are!” said Kate contemptuously. “If you like that sort of thing, you will have plenty of opportunity for devoting yourself to it in the seclusion of Oaklands. I think one might find something more amusing to do.”

“Falling in love, for instance,” said Ada, laughing.

"You see I have no idea what it is like. Do you think you could tell me at all?"

Kate did not see that Ada was in a chaffing mood, and proceeded to give her views with much gravity and importance.

"I don't think it can be very hard to imagine the pleasure of knowing that there is one person who thinks you the prettiest, sweetest, cleverest girl in the world, and to feel that you may torment him as much as you like, and he will have to forgive you, and to see that he is so jealous of you that he can't bear any one to look at you or speak to you."

"That is rather awkward, I fancy."

"Not at all; it is great fun if you are not stupid and inclined to give in to it. Of course, I amuse myself with other people as much as I like. It is quite right that Charlie should see how lucky he is to have won what others would like to win."

Ada felt rather puzzled at those views, but then she was not advanced enough to grasp their full beauty, so she said timidly,

"I think if I cared for any one, I should like him to feel quite sure about it, so that he could not mind whom I talked to."

"I am not such a weakly amiable sort of girl. I should like to be a queen, and all my court to worship me."

She looked at herself as she spoke, and tossed her head back with an insolent sort of vanity. Her youth and beauty saved it from being contemptible, and gave to the gesture an air of graceful playfulness.

"I dare say," she continued, "I should like Charlie best, but it would not be good for him to feel sure of it."

I believe every girl is the same, and you amongst the number if you got the chance. It is all nonsense thinking so little of oneself. Why should not one be admired by lots of people ? ”

Of course this was unanswerable, and sounded like a very proper sort of pride (by the way, most of the prides are not a whit better), but somehow Ada had an inward feeling which refused to agree with all Kate's theories ; being, however, painfully aware of her incapacity to judge in such matters, she let it pass.

The topic changed to one of all-absorbing interest. A scheme was on foot to consult a *diseuse des cartes* (in which lying commodity Brussels abounds) as to their future fate and fortunes.

Kate had ascertained in some mysterious way peculiar to her that two of the other girls had gone one day with Léonie, the servant, to consult the oracle. How she had learnt it she did not divulge, and in this case, as in others, Ada had a vague feeling that Kate's omniscience was not strictly honourable, but she banished it quickly, thinking it evil to suspect her friend.

Kate yearned to know what good things would be predicted for her, and determined to go somehow ; but she reserved for Ada the honour and glory, and, shall we add, the difficulty of accomplishing her object. Ada entered into it with great zest. What girl, aged seventeen, could resist the fascination of fortune-telling ? She arranged it all in the simplest way possible. They would ask permission of Madame Vigier to go out with Léonie to make purchases previous to their departure, and then they would visit the renowned old woman.

There was an amount of mystery, deception, and ex-

citement about the whole thing which was peculiarly fascinating to the feminine mind.

"I wonder what she will tell us," said Kate, dropping into a sentimental mood and contemplating her feet with much pathos as she sat on the side of her bed. "I hope she will say that Charlie is very much in love with me."

"She will have a wide field for conjecture as far as I am concerned," Ada muttered in the midst of a yawn.

"Do you really mean to say, child," questioned Kate from the pinnacle of her superiority, "that no one has ever been in love with you?"

"Such is my utterly destitute and forlorn condition."

"But you can't like it; you must hope that some day or other some one will admire you?"

"That is a state of bliss the charms of which I cannot clearly grasp, not having yet arrived at it."

Ada began to tuck herself up in her little bed and to evade as much as possible the broken spring in the middle.

"Fancy," she added, as she settled herself, "next week I shall have a decently constructed decorous sort of bed to sleep in. I don't know that it will not be monotonous after the excitement of this rock ahead."

Her thoughts flew off after this to her country home, and Kate's further remarks were lost upon her. Her little world was perfect as yet, she knew no desires beyond it. Her eyes were brightened by the sunshine of the fair world; her heart was gladdened by the flowers, the birds, the myriads of beautiful things that rejoiced on God's earth, and as a zone which bound all her happiness around her was her father's love. Never would her

maiden dreams be sweeter than they were as she dropped into slumber that night.

What a fair horizon ! Beauty and sweetness stretching far as the eye can reach ; the roseate light of loving kindness touching the calm waters on which the bark is launched. Is there a cloud creeping up, and can the calm and the hallowing light change to the tossing of the tempest and a murky darkness ?

CHAPTER III.

SPEECH ORACULAR.

WE have all got a great contempt for superstition, have we not? Yet I do not believe that any one of my grave and reverent friends would be utterly indifferent to the predictions of an oracle, provided the deliverer thereof had the right "presence," and a fitting dignity of speech, added to a certain hazy reputation for former accuracy of prophecy. My friends' statements to the contrary go for nothing, for they could not acknowledge such a weakness; in their own words, "they could not be such fools"; being quite unaware what much greater fools they have been on divers occasions. In consideration of this fact, we may all stretch our imagination far enough to sympathise with the flutter of expectation and excitement with which the two girls started, under the admirable guidance of Léonie, for the quays at Brussels, where dwelt the *diseuse des cartes*. On the way Léonie beguiled the time by telling them stories—with true Belgian familiarity—about the people she had lived with, about her own life, about the number of proposals she had received; painting in bright colours her own excellent qualities, her good conduct, and self-respect; putting in contrast the ways and manners of Belgian

servants in general, and telling them *sur ce compte* details with by no means too fine a point on them, which made Ada wonder, feel uncomfortable, and wish to forget them again, and which made Kate laugh, and say "*F'i donc!*" that expression showing, in her idea, a great mastery of the language.

There is a sort of picturesqueness about that part of the town where the fortune-teller lived. The canals full of ships; the old houses here and there with quaint faces; the number of long waggons heavily laden; the roughness of the street-paving; the piles of sabots, of baskets, of cordage, placed anyhow and anywhere for the convenience of buyer and seller; all this was better than the upper and fashionable town. Ada observed all as she walked along, and was interested.

As they turned in through an archway leading into a small court, Kate looked considerably alarmed. She drew the skirts of her dress more closely round her and walked on her toes, as if the place were exceedingly dirty, which it was not. She also came very near Léonie, and looked rather severely at her, as if she was entirely responsible for bringing them into a place which was unsuitable to a fashionable young lady.

There were houses all round the court, long lines of clothes drying in the sun, and numbers of children playing and shouting. One little urchin enjoyed immensely the fun of seeing dainty ladies coming into this place, and screamed in derision, "*à la bonne aventure!*" In her own immediate neighbourhood the prophetess was evidently not much revered.

They went up a narrow staircase into a sanded room, in which a stove took up a good deal of space. The window was close shut, and as a smell of simmering fat

was coming from a saucepan on the stove, the atmosphere was not quite pleasant. Madame Dubois was a greasy, cross-looking woman, whose appearance lessened Ada's small stock of faith, and frightened Kate into the most exaggerated politeness. Ada was dismissed into the adjoining room, as there must not be too many to listen. Her eyes travelled many times round and round the room, from the crucifix over the bed to the old garments hung on the door. She began to think about the life of those who dwelt there, and to wish to understand it. Did this woman believe in her fortune-telling powers? Perhaps long years of habit had educated her into a belief in it all. On the walls there were pictures of saints with halos round their heads; men and women with clasped hands kneeling at their feet. On a chair lay a half-finished coat, in which a black dog of indefinite breed lay curled up, giving little grunts of comfort. Through the closed door which led into the other room came whiffs of the fat and the sound of voices. The card-teller's voice was low and nasal, and almost continuous, while Kate's broke in now and again shrilly, with questions in bad French. Did these red and white daubs on the wall bring into the minds of these poor people any feeling of reverence and peace? Perhaps in her youthful days this old woman had connected them with her young hopes, with some wish accomplished, some evil averted; perhaps now in the evenings she told some wonderful stories about her saints and her cards, some strange tale full of ghastly things and superstitious thoughts, but poetic withal.

Ada thought she would like to sit and listen to such a tale in spite of the smell of simmering fat. She

pictured to herself the old woman's son—for whom, no doubt, the coat was destined—a comely workman in his loose blouse, which showed his bronzed neck, sitting there and giving vent to unbelieving remarks, perhaps bursting into a rough Flemish song, not unmusical to hear. After all, these thoughts of Belgian life amongst this class seemed more interesting than the realities of Madame Vigier's *pensionnat*. At last Ada was summoned, and found Madame Dubois shuffling a very grimy pack of cards with funny birds and beasts on them. She kept looking at Ada all the time,

“*Coupez*,” she said in a deep tone, calculated to give much effect to her revelations.

Then she began to spread them out in a mystical shape, and Ada had to *couper* again and again “*toujours avec la main gauche*.”

“*Voyons, mademoiselle*,” when the table was covered. “*Vous allez faire un voyage . . . Vous aurez une triste vie . . . Toujours des ennemis*.”

She looked up at Ada as she spoke and scanned her face carefully, then recommenced counting.

“*Il y a plusieurs hommes dans vos cartes, mademoiselle. Vous aimerez, je crois, un homme brun*.”

Here she looked at her again, and Ada began to wonder if she saw the reflection of the “*homme brun*” in her eyes. She was on the point of laughing, but the severity of Madame Dubois' face checked any show of amusement.

“*Oui*,” she repeated, “*un homme brun . . . Il y a un homme blond qui fera des démarches pour vous . . . Vous tenez beaucoup à l'homme brun ; cependant il n'est pas si bon que l'autre . . . Toujours des chagrins à cause de lui. Il est jaloux*.”

All this dropped from her lips slowly and with much emphasis, and there were long pauses between each sentence as she counted the cards and took them up. She spoke with such confidence, as if she could not err, that it influenced Ada a little, and she listened with interest and an eerie sort of feeling.

“Ce n'est pas une jalousie sincère; c'est pour si peu de chose.”

Here she made an impatient exclamation as if she were really growing angry at Ada's perversity. “Je n'aime-rais pas un homme comme ça, moi; tant de malheurs à cause de lui . . . Il ne vaut pas la peine.”

Then there was a long silence, and she rearranged the cards.

“Le mariage . . . oui,” she said at last; “mais je ne vois pas que c'est avec cet homme . . . cependant . . . ça se peut. Vos cartes ne sont pas bonnes, mademoiselle. La tristesse et la mort, elles sont là.”

She laid her hand with emphasis on the cards as she spoke, and there was a certain dignity in the action which was impressive.

“Vous avez un ennemi, un fort puissant ennemi. Gare à vous. Les cartes ne parlent plus.”

She picked up the cards, and putting them in a pack, laid them ready for the next comer. Kate did not appreciate waiting, and kept putting her head into the room and asking if the fortune-telling was at an end. As Ada got up, she hurried downstairs with very little ceremony, and seemed to forget her former politeness to Madame Dubois.

“What an abominable place!” she exclaimed, the moment she got clear of the court; previous to that she refrained from expressing any opinion. Seeing her look

of disgust Léonie felt called upon to state that they were "braves gens;" which praise was probably due to the fact that she had been promised a gratuitous séance on a future day.

"I don't know what she calls 'braves gens,'" said Kate, speaking to Ada, "but I felt as if I could never get out of it quick enough, and I regretted very much that I had my purse in my pocket."

"What could have frightened you?" asked Ada; "she did not look a bad old thing."

"She had the most diabolical expression I ever saw. Léonie ought never to have brought us; it was not at all the sort of place I expected."

Léonie turned her head as she heard her name, but of course Kate did not think it necessary to explain what she was saying about her.

One of the advantages of knowing several languages is that you can talk comfortably of your inferiors in their presence, modern politeness not requiring you to study their feelings.

"Your fortune was evidently not satisfactory, you are so cross," said Ada laughing. "Tell me what she said to you."

"I really forget it by this time, she talked such a lot of nonsense. What fools we were to come to a nasty place like this, and pay an old woman for telling us what she knows is a heap of lies!"

"I am not so sure that she knows it. Perhaps she learnt from some one who believed in it, and then perhaps she predicted something that did happen, and by-and-by educated people came to her, and when they seemed to believe in her, it would not be very hard to believe in herself."

"Well, I am perfectly certain she knows she is telling lies. Of course I do not care what she says, but many a silly girl might brood over her stories and make herself uncomfortable."

She drew the line so plainly between herself and the "silly girl," that of course there could be no danger of confounding the two.

"Tell me what she said to you, Ada," she added after a moment's silence.

"She said I was to fall in love with some one who would be quite good-for-nothing, and that I was to be very miserable altogether. I think that was all."

"That sounds lively. But you are just the sort of girl to care for some one in a stupid sort of worshipping way."

"Thank you."

"Yes, really, dear, you are much too 'soft,' as Charlie would call it. I should not wonder if the old witch was a true prophetess in your case."

"I am sure I am not going to be miserable. I do not feel like it at present."

"Mind, you must tell me if it comes true."

"By all means. It is sure to be a most heart-rending tale."

"Oh! I know," she added, with sudden inspiration. "It must be my pet cat at Oaklands. I always had the greatest adoration for it, and I don't believe it cares for me one bit or for anything except making itself comfortable."

"Don't be silly, dear."

"It cannot be on any human creature, I shall waste my affection," she said with mock melancholy. "You forget the 'seclusion' of Oaklands, and my lonely condition which is so much to be pitied."

“It must be like a convent; but perhaps this good-for-nothing will turn up in time; and if he does, you are to tell me all about him—mind.”

“Certainly, down to the minutest particular. I shall mention even whether he began by calling me ‘dear,’ or took an affectionate bound at once to ‘darling.’ I incline to think it will be the latter, with a man of his reckless character.”

In after years the little room, Madame Dubois’ face, the quaint cards, even the colour of the cloth on the table, and the torn window blind, flashed up in Ada’s mind; made a clear picture by the light of strong emotion, though it had lain for long dim and colourless.

CHAPTER IV.

“THERE’S NO LOVE LOST BETWEEN US.”

THE four days—which to Ada were of extraordinary length—came to an end. In due time the good ship *Sea Wave* was moored at St. Katherine’s Wharf, where the two girls, Kate and Ada, were to be met by their relations or other responsible guardians.

When we are very young we go through an amount of superfluous emotion at which in older days we smile. The beating of a young heart is quickened or depressed by the veriest trifle. The organisation is more perfect, and answers like a beautiful ship to its helm.

In leaving Brussels, much as Ada disliked her school-life there, the memory of much good gained came to her mind, the recollection of many a happy day, and of friendly encouragement from Mr. Westbury, so that through the earlier part of her journey she was thoughtful and quiet. She seemed to see one phase of her life passing out of sight. As they approached England the thought of her father and her home quite superseded all else; and again this brightness was dimmed when the vessel was moored, and she knew that an uncle whom she had never seen was going to take charge of her, and forward her to Oaklands. Hitherto she had always been met by her father, and she did not understand why it was not to be so this time.

This uncle was Colonel St. George's only brother, and Ada had never heard much about him. It puzzled her rather, what she was to say to him, but she clung to the fact of his having been at Oaklands in the spring, as a sort of basis for conversational operations. She spent a dismal quarter of an hour looking round and round hopelessly for this uncle; and seeing the other passengers troop off with their friends, all talking at the same time, and thoroughly enjoying the confusion. A party of very fashionable cousins came for Kate Southcote. They stared at Ada, with the well-bred coolness of town manners, for she hovered about Kate as a last hope. Finally, they also departed, Kate almost forgetting her friend's existence till she stopped her to say Good-bye.

"Good-bye," she answered with affectionate condescension; "write sometimes and tell me the news."

After this Ada began to think, in a ludicrously uncomfortable way, that she had better send a sailor up and down the wharf to ring a bell for the lost uncle, or else ask every one if they had seen him. As she was weighing the merits of both plans, some one touched her on the shoulder and she knew he had come at last.

"Your luggage has been examined?" was the first greeting.

"Yes, long ago. I have been waiting some time."

She wished him to recognise that she had been rather ill-used. If it had been her father, he would have been there long before the vessel came into harbour. Her uncle did not take any notice of her rebuke.

"We shall get off at once," he said. "I shall take you to an hotel where we can breakfast; after that I must leave you, as I have business to attend to. I shall come back early enough to take you to the station in time for the express to Dallstoke."

Ada said a feeble "Thank you," and the bustle of getting a cab filled up the next five minutes. When they were fairly started Mr. St. George began to be conversational and Ada to be closely observant. She had got as far as finding his face a rather unpleasant one the first moment he spoke, but now she noticed with much indignation that he was undeniably like her father. It was a likeness of race, not of character.

"I looked at you several times on board," said her uncle, "but could not identify you, as you are not in the least like your father's side of the family."

Ada considered herself very like her father, and in her foolish young mind it was a favourite belief, so her uncle's remark did not increase his attraction.

"Every one at home thinks me very like papa."

"It is a mistake. They say it because they think it will please him. You have your mother's hair, eyes, and expression, and show your Italian blood as plainly as can be."

He said it with a smile, but his tone sounded as if he thought it a dire offence to betray her half Italian birth.

"Well," he said towards the end of the drive, "I hope you have profited by the education you have received. You know French very well I suppose, and are a very good musician?"

Ada felt as if she were gradually returning to the age of twelve, for nothing but extreme youth could justify such questions. She resisted the catechism with all the spirit of her sixteen years!

"I cannot help knowing French very well, for I have heard nothing else from morning till night; but I am a very bad musician; I don't think any one can be worse."

Her uncle looked at her and the look was significant, for, sitting at the same side of the cab, he had to turn his body to give full force to his gaze.

“I am surprised, but that comes of sending girls to expensive foreign schools. I always told your father that it was a ridiculous thing to do.”

Her father's judgment being called in question was what Ada could not listen to silently; in her innocent mind she was inclined to think it wicked! So she said stoutly,—

“I am sure papa had a very good reason for sending me there, and it is my own fault if I have not learnt as much as I ought.”

She would have liked to have added,—“And I don't care in the least what you think.” It must have been some miraculous interposition of providence which saved her from saying it.

“It is quite proper you should think that all your father does is right,” replied her uncle with bland approbation. “It is a pity you were idle. Your cousin Sylvia plays admirably and can speak several languages. I educated her at a country school in England.”

Their arrival at the hotel put a stop to this very satisfactory talk and interrupted Ada's thoughts, which were drifting steadily towards the conclusion that Sylvia must be a most objectionable person.

Some people's way of eating is very irritating, and amongst them that of Mr. St. George. It indicated—as trifling actions often do more than words—that he considered himself a business man, whose attention was so entirely occupied with practical things that little details of refinement he could leave to others. He therefore ate

largely and coarsely as if breakfast was a necessary interlude leading to some forcible and material action.

Ada did not like it, but then young girls are oftentimes fanciful, and already she was inclined to be prejudiced. The world of women is small, and nature has gifted them with perceptions as sensitive as the antennæ of more feeble creatures; they are not quite unwise to trust somewhat to their protective power.

Mr. St. George was a tall spare man, and was by many called "fine looking," without in the least knowing what they meant by it. He had not an encouraging face. Ada found this out as she sat at breakfast and tried to talk. It is a rooted idea in the youthful mind that conversation is one of the primary duties of life.

"Do you know why papa did not come to meet me?"

The question was not quite complimentary, but Ada did not think of it in that light.

Her uncle raised one eyebrow—that was a peculiarity of his, it expressed a good deal of astonishment. "The journey is much too fatiguing for him. Your father is far from well."

"What is the matter?" she said quickly; "he never told me."

In one second every sort of horror had rushed into her mind, from a broken leg to smallpox.

"I found him greatly altered—"

Ada did not allow him to finish what he was going to say.

"Of course you did, you have not seen him for years and years."

"You interrupt me; I was going to add that his constitution is quite broken, and I fear his health is failing fast."

He had not meant to speak quite so strongly, but interruption and contradiction are apt to intensify one's words.

"He cannot be really ill," Ada said with a sad ring in her voice. "He ought perhaps to take more care of himself, but you don't know papa; he is much stronger than he looks."

She felt as if indignant denial would make the cruel fact of his illness impossible. In one moment this uncle had blown the blackest cloud across her life. She was divided between rage at this bad news, for which she *was sure* there was no reason, and a desire—which was scarcely controllable—to burst out crying. The anger got the best of it, when her uncle added,—

"Of course your father has not told you, because you are such a child, but young as you are, I think it right to mention it, for I understand you will be at home altogether now, and you will be able to do a great deal for your father. I am sure you will consider him in everything, which, perhaps, if you thought him quite strong, you might not be so careful to do."

A very proper and kind piece of advice no doubt, but to have her duty pointed out in this way, when her duty had been always so one with her love that it could never be neglected, was to Ada's rebellious soul an unwarrantable piece of interference. She went very near hating her Uncle Henry on the spot. His square face and calm smile were odious to her.

"I am sure you exaggerate; you don't mean to, of course," (the latter sentence was to tone down the rudeness of the first; it sounded rather worse than she intended it should). "Papa would have told me, I know he would, he tells me everything."

Mr. St. George did not answer, but his look conveyed that she was much too foolish to argue with, and he changed the conversation to the subject of Oaklands. He received very languid answers at first, for Ada was thinking so much of her father that she did not give heed to anything else, but she was roused presently when Mr. St. George said that most of the timber in the place ought to be cut down, and that he had told her father so.

“But he won’t do it,” she said quickly and with confidence.

“No; so much the worse for him. He could make no end of money by it, and the woods would be as fine as ever in fifteen or twenty years. There are, indeed, parts of the estate where the timber is so poor that it would be best to stub it up altogether and till.”

This he said, more as if explaining a plan to himself, than talking to his niece.

“You would destroy the whole beauty of the place. The woods are lovely; what would Oaklands be without them!”

The Arian heresy was never more shocking to the early Christians than this suggestion to Ada.

Her uncle indulged in a smile of superior wisdom. “The woods are very pretty I dare say, but, you see, things are not always kept to play with. It will surely be done some day. I dare say you will live to see it.”

Mr. St. George went out after this, and left Ada to the dreariness of a London hotel. She wandered round and round the room, finding a ‘Murray’s Guide,’ a ‘Bradshaw,’ and the ‘Gentleman’s Magazine’ equally dusty and uninteresting, and seeing nothing in prints of Exhibitions and Horse Races to take her thoughts from her uncle’s unwelcome news.

It had been such a miserable coming home so far ; so unlike any other return, and the only shade of consolation that she had as the time approached for starting to the north country, was that at the station she hoped to see the last of her uncle's ugly face for some time to come.

In Ada's emotional but strong character the roots of dislike to her uncle were already spreading. In the coming years how deep and wide they would grow !

CHAPTER V.

PASSING SHADOW.

ANY one who could walk slowly through the woods at Oaklands on a July evening, without an almost painful sensation of delight in the divine beauty of nature, must have some sad mental or moral deficiency. The eventide had drawn the tenderest softest veil over the hills and valleys, but it hid none of their charms, and the sinking sun shed a glow of approbation on their loveliness, as warm and sweet as the flush that mantles in a maiden's cheek at a word of praise.

Perhaps Ada St. George did not, in her very young days, always consciously think of the world of loveliness in which those days were passed, but its influence was strong in her glad heart, in the untiring lightness of her step, in her eager interest in simple things. Why should men and women be less susceptible to sweet influences than tree or flower! Under a clear sky and sunshine, oak and bracken, elm and primrose are alike perfect in development and beautiful in life. Ada's home-life held no element which was at war with the sweetness of her surroundings. Between Colonel St. George and his daughter, there was perfect trust and love. There was reverence from the one for the honourable glory and experience of age, and from the other for the sweet mystery of youth and joy. As yet even their most

trifling wishes had never been for ten minutes in opposition.

Two months had passed since Ada had come home. She had found her "daddy" as she left him—so she thought—and by this time the memory of her uncle's unpleasant croakings was very faint; quite blotted out, I may say, on this July evening. She was flying through the wood, looking very hot and dishevelled, and rather upset in her mind respecting her small dog Tiney, who wherever she had got to, took no heed of her mistress' calls.

Round a corner Ada suddenly rushed into her father's arms, which held her for a moment while he asked what was the matter.

"I am hunting for that bad dog Tiney," she replied, pantingly. "I am sure she has got into some rabbit hole. I cannot see her anywhere."

She freed herself from her father's hold, and recommenced calling "Ti, Ti," in a tone of such entreaty that if the delinquent had had one fragment of heart she ought to have returned at once; but rabbit holes had always been a snare to Tiney, and no amount of scolding had quite crushed the look of conscious pride with which she often returned, panting and dirty, after the forbidden pleasure.

A dread of an untimely fate for the little dog was always hanging over Ada, and her bright face looked quite distressed though her father was smiling.

"I really believe you are very hard-hearted, papa. I am quite afraid of something happening to Tiney, and you look amused."

"That is because, dear, I am perfectly aware that the long lost is at this moment making a perfect pig of her-

self in the pantry, where I saw Simmonds giving her a dinner large enough for three dogs, and sufficient to prevent her ever running after a rabbit again."

"Oh! that is all right," said Ada, in a relieved tone. "How hot I am, and what a long chase I have had all for nothing!"

Her father put his arm through Ada's, and they walked together with a pleasant dawdling step. There was a likeness between the two, let who would deny it, though just now their expression differed so much that it lessened the resemblance to a great extent. Colonel St. George had his head turned towards Ada, and was looking at her in a peculiarly grave way. His face was always a quiet and almost sad one, but this evening there was a yearning look in his eyes as they rested on his child's fair face. She was looking freely out before her, her face in harmony with the clear blue sky above—not a cloud on it; her heart as joyous and as free from thought of coming change as the winged things that darted or skimmed through the summer air.

"Fairy, I think of going abroad next month."

"Do you?"

She turned towards him quickly. There was a something in the tone which she did not quite understand.

"What has put that into your head?" she added.

"Why do you ask the motive, child? Are you not glad? Will you not like to see a little of the gay world?"

"Yes, I think so, but it seems funny that you should want to go, I thought you would much rather be quiet." Her father did not speak for a minute. She thought she had guessed his reasons for going, and said quickly,—

"You are not going for me, daddy, are you? It

really is very nice here, and I am quite happy; provided," she added with a laugh, "Tiney does not get into a rabbit hole."

"I am not going for you, dear."

"Is it a secret, may I not know?"

"It seems the doctor thinks I ought to go to Homburg and drink the waters there."

Instantly Ada remembered her uncle's words.

"You are not ill, father? Why did you not tell me before?" The brightness passed out of her face swiftly. You could see in the sudden change what depths of feeling this keen tender nature was susceptible of.

"I have been ailing for some time, Fairy. A man of my age cannot expect to be as strong as a lion."

"A man of your age," she repeated indignantly. "Look at Mr. Rivers, he is twice as old, and he is never ill. And Drake, I am sure he is as old as Methuselah, and he works in the garden still."

She would have made out a list of people in the village who were hale and hearty at ninety, but Colonel St. George interrupted her,—

"I suppose I do want patching up, for though I think doctors are a terrible set of fools, I fancy they must be right in this instance, as I have not been feeling quite the thing for a long time."

"Why did you not say so? Why did you not do something sooner?"

She looked at him anxiously, scanning his face to see if there was any change in it.

"I suppose I was too lazy, or I did not think of it; however, it is never too late to mend, is it? Now I am going to make a regular old woman of myself and be cuddled and prescribed for to your heart's content."

It was for Ada's sake he would try to stretch out his life. He knew that even the ordinary health of old age could never be his. For him the day would not be unwelcome when he should be laid by the side of his wife in the little cemetery which they could see beneath them from the hill-top where they were walking; but he would gladly gain if he could for his child's sake a few more years, even though they should be painful ones.

"Is it only silly old Doctor Silver you have seen?"

"No. I was in town in the spring with your uncle, and I consulted one of the great physicians."

"Uncle Henry told me you were not well, but I did not believe him, particularly as you seemed well; but why did not you tell me? I might have done something."

The belief in our power to avert evil is unlimited when we are young. Something to be *done*, and all will be well. It takes a long wrestle with fate and many a fall before we know our own helplessness.

"I dare say I shall get all right at this German place, so do not put yourself in a state of anxiety, you absurd child, I am not dangerously ill."

The wind swept suddenly with a shivering sound through the trees in the upper wood, and as Ada looked down, from the hill where they were walking, across the lawn, the place seemed desolate. The caw of a rook in the beech-trees near the house seemed a sad complaining at its utter loneliness.

"You don't like your Uncle Henry much?" said Colonel St. George, after they had strolled along for some time in silence. "I think you told me so once."

"Not much, but then I saw him for a very short time indeed."

An hour ago she would have spoken more strongly, but now, saddened by her father's illness, it seemed childish to insist on a petty dislike.

"He has been very kind to me lately. You know we used not to be on the best of terms at one time. Your dear mother disliked him very much, I may say intensely. It was strange in a woman of her gentleness. I was perhaps a little unjust to Henry in consequence. Besides this, there were many things in his life for which he was condemned—business transactions which you could not understand. I have now every reason to believe he was unfairly treated. It makes a man hard when everything goes against him; and if his manner is unpleasant, it is probably owing to that in some measure."

"Do you want me to like him?"

"I do not like you to have a childish prejudice against him. It is right you should know these things, and now that you do, I have no doubt it will make a difference when you see him."

Ada did not think that it would, but she did not say so. Her present anxiety was expressed in her next sentence,—

"He is not coming to stay with us, is he?"

Her father could not help smiling at her alarmed tone.

"No, not at present; we shall not have time for any visitors, as I think of leaving in a week or ten days."

"So soon!"

"Won't you be ready, Fairy? Or do you mean to ruin me in gowns first?"

"What I have got will do, I think. Is it a very grand place?"

"There will be a great many people there; but I cannot help you about your dress, I think you look very nice as you are."

By which remark Colonel St. George showed a blissful ignorance of the laws of fashion and a great knowledge of the laws of beauty.


"I should think Homburg would amuse you," he added; "and when you are tired of it we can go somewhere else; perhaps into the mountains in Switzerland."

"You shall not come away till you are quite strong, and of course I shall not find it dull. How can I? It is all new to me, and you will be with me."

The last words touched the old man, and there was a very fervent prayer in his heart that Ada might not miss him yet awhile.

What could she do alone? What could her young head know about business matters; the management of property; the improvement of farms; good and bad tenants; rents; villainy of agents; etc? These were things she was too much of a child to understand. Her books, her garden, her pets, and her poor people, formed a wide enough world for her. In business matters and in the outside world there was too much hardness and ugliness for the tender girl beside him.

Ada was not unfamiliar with suffering. She had tried to relieve it in many a cottage. Not in a grand sort of way, but perhaps one sick person was her nurse's niece, or another was the housemaid's sweetheart, and she was often told many a sad story for the sake of the kindly word that was sure to follow. On Sundays Oaklands was open to every one, and the villagers were free to roam where they pleased; to eat their dinner in the grounds too if they liked, provided they did not strew fragments about, and on these days Ada often played with the children or gave them a feast. Quite without trying, she learnt a great deal about their lives. Helping came of



knowing, and without thinking that she was doing anything fine, she was at all times welcome to those who were sick or in grief.

It always grieved her to see any one suffering, but this illness of her father's touched her in an entirely different way. It was an unknown trouble; something she had never dreamt of before. At first she was very watchful of him; followed him about timidly, and was constantly trying to see in his face the faintest expression of pain. It is the first idea of anything unpleasant which is so unbearable. After a while we grow accustomed to it and forget how it looked at first sight, so softened down does it become.


In time Ada grew familiar with the thought of her father not being well, and felt sure it would be only for a little while, and that he would soon be strong.

Colonel St. George not being of an exacting nature, never brought the fact of his illness more before Ada than could be helped. So the days went by much as usual. August came quickly and found Ada in bright spirits. Before they started, the little cloud of dread about her father's illness seemed to have drifted away, blown by the strong fresh winds of youth and hope.

CHAPTER VI.

“ON A FOREIGN STRAND.”

THE beaten path to Germany, so well known to every one, was full of interest to Ada St. George. They went by way of Paris; and her father, tired and ill though he was, hid it from Ada and took her about—to the opera, to the shops to buy pretty things, and indulged her in every way. It made him feel proud and pleased, yet restless and sad, to note how in the theatre or street people turned to look at his child. He was fading away. She was growing into more ripe and perfect beauty, and he thought of her when he was gone—alone. What would her life be? How naturally and yet how vainly do men try to shield their daughters, their sisters, from knowledge of and contact with the world's cruel reality. A kind of expanded schoolroom life, that is what most of us would desire for them. We have known women brought up tenderly and in an atmosphere of refinement, whose names in after years we have heard coupled with coarse jests and the scorn of libertines. We have seen women shine in society, bowed down to—envied, and we have had perhaps some clue to their real life, and so we would choose for the woman we love a blank life of utter ignorance, filled up with household cares and beautified by simple family affections, growing like an instinct in the heart. We will not recognise the



fact, that any one—be it man or woman—with intellect and depth of character, cannot see things merely on the surface; they will pierce through to the truth and see life as it really is, even though the knowledge be bought by their own sad experience; there are some of us who know brave true women, with pure hearts, who have looked evil in the face—have known the power of temptation and the bitterness of life, and have not accepted the law of expediency, but the eternal law of truth. But the lives of such women are not often known. Up to the surface come generally the two classes; one which drifts with every current, swamped finally by evil; the other which lives in an artificial atmosphere, guarded from all unpleasant reality, ignorant and untried. Of this latter class, Colonel St. George would have had his daughter. It was a horrible pang to him to think that perhaps he could not live to watch over her. He noticed the glances of admiration that fell on Ada; how men, catching but the sway of her figure or the outline of her head, turned to look again. So for her sake he clung to life, and hoped the Homburg springs might give him back a few years of health and strength.

You know, everyone knows, the Untere Promenade, the houses with their balconies filled with oleanders, their little gardens in front, the yards at the back with little cottages at the other side of them, sort of poor dependents of the larger house. You can remember the clean swept yards and the square-shouldered German girls in their rigidly tightened hair and unentertaining cotton frocks, pumping water with a stolid expression.

Oh, the fashionable monotony of these German watering-places! Here are men about town, who have lived

fast, come to patch themselves up so as to infest the earth a little longer with their worn-out bodies and corrupt minds. They feel rather virtuous as they get up early and take a nauseous drink at the springs in the fresh morning air, whose sweetness ought to shame them into a recognition of their own wasted lives which burn low with a gaseous flare. A little excitement at the gaming tables in the evening indemnifies them for the simplicity of their mornings. Here are ball-room beauties a little faded, with all their histories written on their faces,—abroad, because it is quite “the thing” to be abroad; hoping to fill their empty minds with a certain stock of foreign experiences which will come in most usefully in conversation, and serve to make them—what is the great desideratum in modern society—agreeable.

Here are country squires, men who have been ailing for a long time, and whose doctors have looked at them, put their heads knowingly on one side and said, “What do you say to trying the German waters?” The suggestion being quickly taken up by the wives and daughters, they are dragged thither, unwilling victims on the plea of health. Poor devils! they are thinking of their quiet homes, their crops, their swindling stewards, of how their grooms are probably playing the deuce with their horses, and yet they are valiantly trying to look amiable, to study—from their own point of view—the peculiarities of these Germans and to form general liberal notions about foreign countries in comparison with their England. Having growled at everything abroad and looked on the people as a lower development of the species, they will be heard to make lengthy speeches at their own firesides, to their un-

travelled neighbour, beginning thus, "I must say this for the Germans, from my experience of them—etc."

Here are "nouveaux riches," trying to nurse a transient acquaintance with aristocracy—to which a foreign watering-place is favourable—into an intimate friendship. Fierce radicals at home, they deprecate bitterly in strong language, during their after-dinner talk, "the indolent and pampered members of the upper ten, who are an ignorant, insolent, arbitrary, narrow-minded set, opposers of all progress!" Here in their morning walk they experience a thrill of pleasure as they lift their hat to a countess or bow with easy familiarity to a baron!

But amongst all these, there are sometimes young girls—and more rarely young men—with fresh unworldly hearts, who take the brightness where they can find it, to whom Homburg is neither a vanity of vanities nor a dwelling-place of dangerous fascination; who dip lightly and without cynicism into the queer mixture of society there, and find some people charming and some unbearable, with the quick instinct of untainted minds. Ada St. George was one of these. All the strange flow of life interested her. In the gardens, at the *table d'hôte*, for any face she liked, she wove a history, and saw it live and act in many a scene which her imagination drew.

They were a picturesque couple, Colonel St. George and his daughter, the former was the type of a well-born Englishman, with his quiet manners, dignified even to coldness. His child's strongest point of resemblance to him was in the curve of her upper lip, which somehow made other faces seem, in comparison, ignoble. They were soon noticed, these two, always

walking together, and after due discussion and consultation a great many of the fashionables saw fit to call on the St. Georges.

“What a worry people are,” said Colonel St. George one day when several cards had been left. “I wish they would leave us alone.”

“I wish they would,” said Ada heartily; “suppose we do not return their visits?”

Colonel St. George had expected that Ada would eagerly seize the opportunity of making new acquaintances, and was quite pleased, with all a father’s selfishness, when he found it otherwise.

“That would not do, dear,” he said with a smile, “but do you really not want to have any companions?”

“We do very well without them, daddy; what should I say to all those people? You forget I am not accustomed to ladies.”

“Your schoolfellows, Fairy?” he said in astonishment.

“Disagreeable, mean-spirited, gossiping girls, I did not like them at all.”

“But all women are not like that, child.”

“No, I suppose not, but still I should not know what to say, and I should feel teased and wish it were over.”

“Are we to leave cards, then?”

“Yes, that will do beautifully, and we can get the ‘padre’ to circulate that we are much obliged, but can do very nicely without friends.”

Her father smiled satisfiedly.

“By the way,” she continued, “what a dreadful person Mr. Harwood is; how different from the padre of our regiment.”

“Do you remember him, Fairy?”

“Of course I do.”

“He was a fine fellow; no cant or humbug about him; a true Christian, made of the right stuff.”

“I suppose Mr. Harwood thinks it very wicked of us to go out of church before the sermon?”

“I suppose so, but I cannot listen to his nonsense. I am afraid, Fairy, I have not brought you up in much knowledge of orthodoxy or any other doxy. You will be terribly at fault in society when some one starts a religious discussion and expects you to join.”

“I shall not say a word, and then they'll think me a person of deep reflection!”

“You see, Fairy, your mother was a Catholic, and I a Protestant, and it may have been from constant association with her that I learnt that one may be truly religious-minded, no matter what the form of belief. The truth is, neither of us was bigoted; we felt what we tried to teach you, that religion is a thing apart from all creeds.”

“Yes,” she said quietly and thoughtfully.

“Sometimes I think you may be at a disadvantage in the world from not having had all these differences of creeds drilled into your head, but I must say I could not torture you with them.”

“Oh! I have learnt all about it now. At first when I went to school I was looked upon as a little heathen; there were so many things I did not understand; but I asked so many questions, I know it all now.”

“You are very quick; just like your mother in that respect, but you will never make a woman of business, Fairy, never.”

Her father had drifted off to a subject which had been very much in his mind of late.

“What do you want me to be a woman of business for?”

“It is a good thing to be practical. Some women can manage their own affairs splendidly.”

“I must say, child,” he added, with a smile, “I should not like you to be one of those strong-minded persons. There is a sphere for women and a sphere for men. I do not at all agree with the current ideas of the present day, about women competing with men in life. Woman, the type of all that is clinging, gentle, and dependent, must indeed change her nature if she is going to struggle for the foremost place.”

These were just the words to expect from a man such as Colonel St. George, not said in a weakly argumentative way because as a man he loved the monopoly of power, but from a chivalrous conviction that woman was a being to love, protect, and work for, a being who had well done her part if she elevated, refined, and glorified the life of man.

“I wish I had been a boy,” said Ada emphatically.

“Why, dear?”

“Because it would have been much nicer for you to have had a son; besides I think I have a boy’s nature, I cannot get on with girls. Do you remember what friends I was with all your brother officers, how kind they were to me, and how happy I was in those old days?”

“It might have been better for some reasons had you been a boy,” Colonel St. George said very slowly and reflectively.

“Yes, of course it would. I should have been so much more of a companion for you. I am always feeling when you are talking to me seriously on any important subject that you have to check yourself, because you think you

are getting beyond my depth. You know I cannot understand because I am a girl, and it cramps you and narrows your life down to my limits."

Ada spoke indignantly as if nature had behaved rather badly to her.

"You are quite wrong, dear child. As far as I am concerned, I am very glad you are a girl. You are so like your mother, that to see you resemble her in every look and little way has made me love you more than I could ever have loved a son; but for your own sake, Fairy, I am sorry."

"Why?"

"Because in all worldly business matters, a man is more independent, can look after his own interests better."

"I am sure I could be quite useful and business-like if you taught me."

Colonel St. George shook his head with a smile.

"You would never have any more idea of business than that table. Why," he added, with a laugh, "I don't believe you can even make yourself a dress, you lazy frivolous creature!"

"Indeed I can," she answered indignantly, "the dress I wore yesterday I made all myself."

"Well, run off and put it on now, and let me see it. It is nearly time for the *table d'hôte*."

"Did you not say we were to go to a new *table d'hôte* to-day?"

"Yes, if you like. Let us try the *Kursaal*."

CHAPTER VII.

FIRST WORDS.

HITHERTO, Ada's experience of *table d'hôte* neighbours had been of the dreariest description. Sometimes an old lady had sat beside her, who concentrated her full attention on the food, and frowned most ferociously at some "foreign mess," as she refinedly called it, and whose only attempt at conversation was an endeavour to draw forth an expression of sympathy from Ada. Sometimes a young man, with much self-importance and little or no brains, having ascertained with the help of an eye-glass that Ada was "deuced good-looking," attempted to talk across the table to her. Except that his silly and disjointed sentences afforded her some slight amusement afterwards as a subject for ridicule, individuals of this class did not add much to Ada's enjoyment.

In hope of being more lucky they were to dine at a new place to-day.

"Of course it is fun seeing such quantities of people," said Ada as they walked to dinner, "but I do not see the great enjoyment of being *always* with strangers who do not care a bit about you. I believe half of them keep repeating the same things like a parrot, and do not know it. There is a girl that comes to the *Russie* every day, a different person sits next her each time, and she has said precisely the same things to them all!"

“There are people who live for that sort of thing. I hope you'll never arrive at that assinine condition, Fairy.”

“Lock me up and never let me open my lips if I do,” she answered as they went into the Kursaal.

There were quite a new set of people here, and amongst them Colonel St. George recognised some one, for as Ada took her seat she heard her father exclaim,—

“Ah, Seaton, who would have thought of meeting you here!”

Of course Ada craned her neck to look past her father and see who it was. She was caught in the act, for he turned suddenly and introduced her.

“General Seaton, Ada, an old brother officer. He knew you when you were a wee child.”

He was a pleasant-countenanced, soldierly-looking man. Ada was greatly pleased that they had stumbled on General Seaton, for she began to fear that her father was boring himself horribly at this place, and she noticed that his face quite brightened at meeting his old friend.

For a little while Ada was included in their conversation, and then left to her own thoughts. She studied every one except her next neighbour, whom it was difficult to look at without being rude.

In thinking of Homburg in after-years it seemed strange to Ada that she should ever have met any one of intelligence there. Is not a German watering-place like this, the most inane of all human dwelling-places? Surely no one but those organically wrong in body or mind can resort thither!

Ada was wondering to-day if her neighbour would speak. If he did, she could see his face with ease, and

she was curious to look at him well. They were half-way through dinner, and he had not articulated.

“Ought I to begin?” thought she.

She was half tempted to do so, but felt awkward and lazy about it, and perhaps a lingering recollection of Madame Vigier made her feel not quite sure if it would not be an offence against the decorum of a *comme-il-faut* young lady to be the first to commence a conversation.

“Would you like one of the windows open?” he said suddenly, “it is very warm here.”

“Yes, thank you, I should like it.”

Ada looked at him quickly as she answered. It was a fine face and the voice was pleasant, deep, and rich without any peculiarity of accent. As he took his seat again after having opened the window, he turned towards her and began to speak at once.

“I have been wanting to talk to you, but it is so hard to begin.”

It seemed a familiar way of speaking, but there was something in the tone prevented its being so, something frank and simple.

Ada turned to him with a laugh.

“I have been wondering if you would try!”

“Do you like this place?” he asked, pushing his plate away and resting his elbow on the table.

“Yes, very much, we have only been here a week, and I have not had time to tire of it yet.”

He smiled a little.

“We differ in our tastes. I do not like it at all. I have only been here for twenty-four hours, and am heartily sick of it already.”

“Then why did you come?”

The instant she spoke it occurred to Ada that this was

rather an impertinent inquiry. These thoughts always did occur to her when too late. She reddened uncomfortably. He did not answer at once.

"I came to see a friend of mine, and will go away soon."

Then he added, "Do you know many people here?"

"No—no one. My father has just come across an old brother officer of his, and that only to-day; so you see our acquaintances are limited."

"How is it you do not find it dull, it must be dreary for you if you know no young people?"

It seemed strange the way he spoke, as if he were quite old himself, and Ada thought of this instead of answering him.

"How ugly all these people are!" he said presently.

"They can't help it, poor things."

"That does not make it any pleasanter to look at. Why is there not more beauty in the world? It is so refreshing, and makes one feel better and happier."

Everyone began to move, Colonel St. George among the rest, so Ada got up. Her new acquaintance stood up also.

"Do you go to the band this evening?" he asked.

"No, my father is not well and is afraid to go out late, and I have no one to take me."

"I am sorry," he said simply.

Ada looked at him with a surprised pleasure in her face. It sounded kind of him to be sorry.

"Come, Fairy," said her father, touching her on the shoulder; so she bowed, and they went away with General Seaton.

"Who was that you talked to at dinner?" Colonel St. George asked.

“How can I tell?” she answered, laughing; “an Englishman, I believe; what does it matter?”

“You both talked so much it might have come out in conversation.”

“No, I did not ask him for references,” she answered flippantly, “neither did he ask me.”

“One meets all sorts of people at these places,” General Seaton remarked, “they come and go; there are fresh faces every day.”

Ada's new acquaintance passed quite close to them, and took off his hat. She fell a-wondering if he had heard their conversation.

“Do you remember, St. George,” General Seaton began, “just before the war in Afghanistan”—and then Ada heard no more, for she was busily following her own thoughts as they walked through the sunny streets to the Untere Promenade. Ada wanted to go to the band that night. She had visions of bright faces and gay music, and wanted pleasure; anything that came, she would not be fastidious in her choice; she had a longing for the sound of laughter and young voices, and felt a sudden desire for the sunshine of life. It came like a flash into her mind, this wish for something differing from her past pleasures. She could not tell whence the wish arose, but she seemed all at once to waken to a wider life and a keener brightness.

Ada looked at young girls that passed, and in comparison thought herself a “dowdy.” She did not fully appreciate her own gifts in those days, and thought every one's appearance depended chiefly on their attire. She knew she was pretty, at least her ideas respecting herself were not quite so clearly defined, but she knew that nothing teased her when she looked at herself in the glass, for

she had a straight nose and a pleasant mouth, and from her southern mother had got that crisp dark hair, with a golden burnish on it, which it was never a trouble to arrange prettily. The only point about her, that in those days she thought of being proud of, was her eyes. Nurses perhaps, or servants, had remarked them, and later on her father's friends had said in her presence that they were "a wonderful blue," and so it came to pass some way or other that she liked them. Ada was engaged in her frivolous thoughts, till they reached the Untere Promenade.

"I shall see you in the evening, I suppose. You'll stroll out to hear the music," General Seaton said to them both as he stood at their door.

Ada said nothing, she left it to her father, but she coloured with anxiety, and looked, silly girl, as if she were harbouring some very wicked thought.

"I am not up to going out so late," Colonel St. George answered. "It's dull for Fairy, but you see it cannot be helped."

Ada felt ashamed for a second of having even wished to go, but only for a second, for the General's next words made her most desirous to be there.

"Could I not take Miss Ada? As I knew her when she was a baby, she might go with an old fogie like me, I think."

Ada of course looked as if she would like it.

"Will you go with Seaton, Fairy?" her father asked, looking at her and smiling.

"Oh! yes, if it does not bother him."

"I shall be very proud," the old General replied. So two hours later General Seaton and Ada were walking through the gardens arm-in-arm. He was pleasant to

talk to, with his brisk way of speaking and courteous manner. To Ada it seemed that he knew a great deal, and that it was very good of him to talk to her and listen, as if it were a pleasure, to her remarks. They went into the Kursaal, and walked round the gaming tables. It looked rather wicked and fascinating to Ada; this was the first time she had seen the rooms by gaslight. The eager faces, the hushed voices, all seemed exciting, and she rather wished to risk a florin, but was afraid to ask General Seaton.

“Would you like to try?”

Ada knew, before she looked round, that it was her new friend that spoke.

“Very much,” she answered quickly.

Then as General Seaton turned in a surprised sort of way, she began, without thinking, to introduce them.

“General Seaton, Mr. —”

“Kingsley,” he said in an instant.

Ada blushed very much.

“Oh, I beg your pardon,” she said hastily, “I did not mean to ask your name. It never occurred to me that I did not know it.”

“Why should you not ask it? Will you tell me yours?”

“Ada St. George.”

General Seaton looked amused and astonished, perhaps he thought it rather a responsible post to be chaperon to a girl who seemed to make acquaintances so readily.

“Don’t you find it pleasanter out than in these close rooms?” Mr. Kingsley said to General Seaton.

“Yes, let us go.”

So they went into the gardens. The two men talked together, and Ada listened. They discovered that Mr.

Kingsley had known a brother of the General's, who had been in the Rifle Brigade, so after a while they got on famously. Mr. Kingsley was an officer; his conversation with General Seaton soon enlightened Ada on that subject, and she felt pleased. In her limited ideas of society, military men were the only Englishmen that were bearable. She had a childish pride in being half Italian, and a desire to parade the fact on all occasions, lest by any means it might be overlooked, and she might pass as entirely Saxon; but her father being an English soldier, she conceded to English soldiers, in her own mind, many goodly qualities. The world had not opened out much to this child, or as yet enlarged her stock of ready-made ideas.

As they walked along it occurred to Ada that she must seem very childish, for General Seaton and Kingsley talked on together, scarcely heeding her. She liked to listen to them; it never came into her head to feel neglected. There were lamps glimmering through the trees, the sound of music dying away and springing to life again—as they approached the band or receded from it,—pretty women and gay voices, and what more could a girl wish for, who was scarce seventeen, and to whom everything was fresh and pleasant?

“We have had all the conversation to ourselves,” General Seaton said presently. “Not very amusing, Miss St. George, for you.”

“I am very glad,” Ada said, “if you had talked to me I should not have found anything to say.”

“I am not sure of that; but I might not have the knack of drawing you out.”

Here they met a man who stopped when he saw them, hesitated, went on a step, then suddenly turned back, and touched Kingsley on the shoulder.

"You here, Kingsley," he said, "how are you?"

The others moved on, and Kingsley remained a little behind to speak to his friend. He was up with them again in a minute.

"Strange way one stumbles on people," he said to Ada. "I have not seen that fellow since I first joined my regiment. I wonder what brings him here; those wretched gaming tables, I suppose."

Nothing occurred to Ada to say, so she remained silent.

"He asked me who you were. How ridiculous it is that every one wants to know who every one is in a place like this."

"I hope you satisfied his curiosity?"

"I believe I said that you were a Miss Seaton, and your friend a General St. George. I was thinking of something else, and now he will tell his friends with confidence what your name is!"

"He can look for us in the visitors' book. That has been my only study since I came here."

"I should think you had pretty well exhausted the interest of it by this time."

"Oh, no, there are always some fresh arrivals, and I amuse myself adding, in my own mind, a full description of each person suitable to the name."

"What description would you have placed after my name?"

"I must know the Christian name too," Ada said laughing.

"Herbert."

"Herbert Kingsley, Herbert Kingsley, let me think: a slight dark man, with long hair, delicate sharp features, and a gloomy, thoughtful expression; altogether a man

such as I would imagine an author to be." He did not reply, and did not laugh, and Ada began to be afraid that she had said something she ought not to have said.

"It is very strange," he said after a minute, "you have described some one I know of the same name."

He paused a moment and then added, "not very like me at any rate."

"Not very," she said, looking at his tall, strong figure, tanned complexion and fair curling hair.

"Time for us to go home, Miss Ada, is it not?" said General Seaton; "your father will be watching for you."

"It is very early," she said, looking at her watch; "we need not go yet, need we? It is so nice here."

The last words were said in a tone of such simple enjoyment that Kingsley looked at her wonderingly. This girl, with a woman's beauty and a child's manners, surprised and interested him perhaps a little.

"As you like," General Seaton answered.

They took another turn round the garden, but, except for an occasional word, the conversation did not fall to Ada. The two men discoursed of India, politics, the army; and she was not much noticed. After that, General Seaton and Ada turned home, and Mr. Kingsley said good-night.

Colonel St. George looked fidgety when they came in, and seemed glad when General Seaton left.

"Well, what did you do?" he asked; "whom did you meet?"

"We walked round the gardens and into the gambling rooms, and we met Mr. Kingsley."

"And who in the world is Mr. Kingsley?"

Ada laughed.

“ Oh, I forgot, he is the man who sat next me at dinner to-day.”

“ You seem very *au-fait* at his name, how did you find it out ? ”

“ From himself. General Seaton knows all about him in some sort of way : ” she was stretching facts a little.

“ How so ? ”

“ You are dreadfully inquisitive to-night, daddy. Mr. Kingsley was or is in the army, I believe, and knew General Seaton’s hundred and fifty-fifth cousin, I think, or something of that kind.”

Her father said nothing more, but Ada saw a look come in his face very like that with which he received the announcement that her greatest friend at school was Mr. Westbury. She laughed to herself, she was too light hearted to care about it, or give it a moment’s thought.

CHAPTER VIII.

“BLITHE, BLITHE, AND MERRY WAS SHE.”

WHEN Ada went down to the springs next morning with her father, she felt brighter than usual, talked more about her immediate surroundings, and less about Oaklands. She did not know why she took more interest in things, but when Mr. Kingsley joined them, the feeling of brightness became more definite, and she decided that it came from knowing some one, and not being so entirely alone in the crowd.

“This is papa,” she said, after bidding Mr. Kingsley good morning.

He bowed, and, leaving her side, walked next to Colonel St George, paying this slight attention to his years as a matter of course, though he would have much preferred talking to Ada.

By-and-bye they met General Seaton, and Kingsley fell back naturally with Ada while her father talked to his old friend.

“You are not gone yet!” she said presently, remembering his expressed anxiety to get away.

“No, nor shall I for some days. To tell the truth, I don’t quite know what I am going to do next, and am leaving it rather to the fates to decide. Do you always know what you are going to do next? I suppose I need not ask, that is all decided for you, is it not?”

"Yes. I know that we shall stay here till papa is much better, then we shall go home and remain there for ever so long."

"Would it be rude to ask, where is 'home'?"

"Not in the least. Home is in Westmoreland, and home is a beautiful place."

"You don't want me to describe it," she added, "for I do not think I could."

"I should like to hear you try," he answered, looking at her with interest.

She seemed quite a child to him; not at all like girls he usually met. It amused him to make her talk.

"No, no," she said, shaking her head. "You would have to see it all to know what it is like; to get up early and see the morning sun on the streams; or sit in the woods and listen to the birds, or walk on the terrace in the summer's evening, and watch the clouds sweeping over the hills."

"Ah! you've described it after all, and the rest is told by your face."

The enthusiastic expression had quite filled up what was wanting.

"I suppose you have quantities of brothers and sisters to enjoy it with you?" he asked.

Ada did not see that Mr. Kingsley was informing himself pretty accurately about her, and even if she had, it would never have occurred to her to withhold the information.

"Not one. There is only papa. But," she added quickly, "he is just as good as ever so many brothers and sisters."

"Is it possible for you to get on without girl friends?"

"I don't like girls," she said gravely.

He looked so amused that she thought the statement required explanation.

"They may be very nice, but I have been at a Belgian school, and in the whole school I only liked one girl."

"The exception must have been very charming, no doubt?"

"She was an English girl and we got on very well."

"I have always had a great curiosity to know what girls talk about when they are great friends."

"My friend's conversation," said Ada, laughing, "was a little monotonous. She was engaged to a cousin, and of course she talked unceasingly of 'Charlie.'"

"Very amusing for you! But I was not far wrong in my conjectures; I always thought flirtation was one of the staple subjects of young ladies' 'chats.'"

"It was not a flirtation," Ada said quite seriously, "and they are married now."

"You are very accurate as to terms! Let us call it love, then."

"I hope it is. Why should she marry him if it was not?"

This was a subject on which Ada's ignorance and Kingsley's experience were not likely to agree, so he refrained from answering.

"The topic is sometimes varied by dress, I fancy."

Mr. Kingsley need not imagine that Ada is minded to take everything seriously, and leave all the laugh at his side.

"Yes," she answered, "and grave discussions as to the most becoming way of wearing the hair, and friendly suggestions of recipes for taking away sunburn!"

“Which the adviser invariably hopes will not be of the least use in her friend’s case.”

“I wonder why people say things like that,” Ada said quietly. “Is it because they think it looks clever to say that every one is spiteful, or is it that they are stupid enough really to think so?”

“That is a very severe blow, Miss St. George; my breath is quite taken away!” he said good-humouredly. “Let us change the subject. I won’t answer that question if I am to make such a horrible choice as that you offer me—between conceit and idiocy.”

“Was I very rude?”

“I am afraid so. I think I’ll speak to your father, and ask him why he has brought you up in such total ignorance of the manners of society!”

“How completely you would agree with my school-mistress! She was in the utmost despair because she could not make me feel the importance of doing and saying things that were ‘*comme il faut*.’”

Colonel St. George, if he had hearkened to his child’s conversation with Mr. Kingsley, would have been rather astonished at the rapid strides they had taken into friendliness. He guessed it a little, on seeing the animation which still lingered in Ada’s face, when General Seaton and Mr. Kingsley had left them, and they were walking home together. He thought he ought to warn Ada not to accept friendliness too hastily. His sense of duty as a parent made him feel very uncomfortable, and he began to consider a good deal more what Ada would think about it than what he did himself. He was guiltily conscious all the while that this was not an orthodox parental feeling.

“This Mr. Kingsley seems rather a gentlemanly fellow,” he began.

"Yes, he is very nice," was Ada's prompt reply. "It is very amusing to talk to him."

"You know, Fairy, you must not be in too great a hurry to make friends at a place like this."

"Why?"

This is a most confusing interrogative, particularly when you have never silenced such inquiry by the unerring reply, "because *I* think so."

Colonel St. George felt much puzzled.

"Because men are not very often such gentlemen as they seem, and if you are too intimate with them at first, it is difficult to draw back."

This advice had not quite the effect intended, for Ada laughed.

"Then I am always to be stiff and dignified, and to say 'yes' and 'no' prettily!"

"I do not wish you to be disagreeable," he said a little crossly, "but if you have any sense you will soon find the happy medium."

"When may I begin to make remarks about the weather? There ought to be a book about these things."

She spoke quite gravely, but there was a contradictory expression in her eyes, and Colonel St. George could not help smiling. Nevertheless, he was not to be laughed out of the subject.

"I am not a straightlaced old father, and you must acknowledge that I know more of the world than you do; therefore, Fairy, you must not treat flippantly anything I am in earnest about."

She was really grave now.

"I beg your pardon, it was only in fun, and I will remember."

She was silent the rest of the way home, and was

thinking what an unpleasant place the world was, and what hateful people it must be full of, if she was always to be on her guard, and for ever thinking of what she ought and ought not to say. Of course her thoughts ran on into the refuge of youth, viz., that perhaps it looked like that to old people, but it was not really so bad.


The direct result of this conversation between Colonel St. George and Ada was that, when they all met at dinner—Kingsley sitting next Ada, he could not extract from her anything but the shortest and properest of sentences. Having wondered what in the world could be the matter with her, and having made several attempts to draw her out of her frigid state, Kingsley gave it up, as he was a man who never bored himself if he could help it, and who found the problem of young ladies' airs very uninteresting.

Singularly he could not have taken a better mode of restoring Ada to her normal condition; for looking round the table for something to amuse her, she fell to watching an English girl at a little distance. She was drawn up to a most correct perpendicular, and was giving monosyllabic replies to her next neighbour, as if he were her direst enemy.

After observing her closely for a while, Ada began to laugh. Kingsley of course inquired the cause, and behold, without an instant's reflection she has asked him if he can recognise a likeness between herself and the said English girl!

"Yes, you have been very like her, but, if you will allow me to say so, it does not suit you."

She had done away, at one stroke, with the impression of dignity that she had been trying to leave on Mr Kingsley's mind!



"I have been trying to be quite English, but I can't manage it."

"Are you not quite English?"

"No. My mother was an Italian Papa married her at the Cape. She died ten years ago."

"Then you do not remember her?"

"Yes, quite well. I know she allowed me to do anything I liked; never scolded and never punished me. I believe I was a horrid little spoilt wretch, and gave a great deal of trouble."

"You could not have been very bad, or your mother would have punished you in self-defence."

"I recollect quite well always making a dreadful noise when she was ill, never being able to realise that it did not give other people as much pleasure as it gave me, to prance up and down the stairs and scream at the top of my voice!"

Ada ran on without thinking that perhaps these juvenile reminiscences might not be very entertaining to Kingsley.

"Do you torment your father at the present day?"

"Oh! papa, that is a different thing; he does not allow himself to be tormented, somehow; besides, I have had the strict training of a French school since those days."

Kingsley made a face.

"What a horrible place a French school must be."

"Indeed it is," Ada said, delighted to find any one to sympathise with her feelings on the subject.

"Well, I suppose you know the language thoroughly, and can appreciate French literature."

"I have never had much to appreciate, except school-books."

"No Victor Hugo, no Dumas?"

"No. All novels were strictly forbidden."

"Did that put a stop to the reading of them?"

"I used to catch glimpses of very greasy-looking books which were handed from one to another of the girls in a mysterious sort of way, but I was not liked well enough to share the circulating library."

"I think fortune has favoured you, and you have escaped reading a great deal of rubbish."

"Victor Hugo and Dumas are not rubbish, are they?"

"By no means; they are very clever and very pretty—some of their works. I can lend you a few of Dumas', if I may."

"Of course you may. It is very kind of you, but if you are going away, what shall I do with them?"

"Burn them if you like; bestow them on the first person you meet, or do anything else you like with them."

Ada thought he seemed rather annoyed with her for asking him, and that his sentence would have sounded more complete if he had added, "but don't bother me about them." She felt inclined to say it for him, but on this occasion did not yield to her impulse.

"By the way," Kingsley said, as they got up from dinner, "what is your address? Please save me the trouble of hunting it up in the visitors' book."

"Nine, Untere Promenade," she answered, smiling.

So Ada parted from Kingsley, having told him a good deal of her family history and given him her address. Alas, for her father's counsel!

The evening was drizzly and damp, and though the old general offered to take Ada out, her father did not seem to wish her to go, and was cheerful and talkative with a kind of forced gaiety which was aggravating to Ada.

The late post brought some news which put Ada in a

good temper, a letter from Kate Southcote, now Kate Bruton, to say she would be in Homburg the following day, to stay for a month.

"I am very glad, Fairy," Colonel St. George said, when he heard it, "very glad."

There seemed a look of relief in his face as he spoke.

"You will like Kate, she fascinates every one."

"I think it will be very nice for you, dear, to have some lady here whom you know and like."

"I shall be able to go to the balls then," she said, her mind rushing on at headlong speed to all the possible delights resulting from Kate's coming.

Colonel St. George smiled at her half sadly, as one who is far removed from all pleasure, and it struck Ada suddenly that he was looking pale and wan. The arrival of the books changed the current of her thoughts.

When the parcel came in, Colonel St. George inquired what it was.

"Some books Mr. Kingsley offered to lend me."

He did not make any remark immediately; then after a minute he said,

"Show them to me, Fairy."

She brought them over and laid them down beside him, smiling to herself.

He took one up, and looked at the title.

"I'll be hanged if I can make it out!" he said; "some French rubbish, I suppose."

"It is French, but not rubbish."

"How do you know? I must say I do not think that Mr. Kingsley is quite a fit person to choose books for you to read."

"But, daddy," she said, eagerly, dreading lest the books should be returned, "they are written by Alex-

andre Dumas, and every one knows his works; they are historical, like Sir Walter Scott's."

Ada brought out this rash assertion triumphantly.

"If you know anything of the writer, that makes a difference, but generally French novels are not edifying, and I would rather you did not read them."

He seemed glad that the subject could be dismissed.

Ada pushed away the books, and sat down beside him.

"How like your mother you grow," he said, turning her face round to him with his hand.

"What happy days those were when you were a wee thing, and we tried to teach you to read! Your mother used to laugh at my impatience. You called her 'Piccola Mamma.' Do you forget your Italian quite, Fairy?"

"No. I kept it up at school. I don't think I shall ever forget it; it is so much prettier than English."

"I never could learn it."

"Would you not like to go to Italy some day?"

"I do not think it likely that I shall take many more journeys, except one."

"What do you mean?" she said quickly, but she knew too well.

Seeing he did not answer, she added half angrily,

"How can you talk like that, father?"

Such words seemed to her a deliberate cruelty. He was close beside her, looking much the same as ever; how could she realise the coming change.

"Don't be cross, pet, I want to tell you something which I wish you to remember. Whenever I die, I particularly desire to be buried beside your mother. Do not look so indignant," he added, smiling, "I shall not die a bit sooner, child, because I tell you this."

"That is true," she said gently, "but why talk of it

at all? It will be quite time enough when you are an old, old man."

"But you will remember Fairy?"

"Yes."

She laid her hand in his, and thus they sat for the rest of the evening. In the dim light they talked of home and all they would do in the winter. The old dread came into Ada's mind, but it seemed possible in planning the coming months to make that dread vanish.

CHAPTER IX.

PARENTAL WARNING.

MR. KINGSLEY was not at all lacking in acquaintances at Homburg. Ada noticed that when he was walking with her he bowed to people very often ; but he seemed to prefer her society, and she was most genuinely pleased thereat. She was always quite sure when she and her father were walking up and down at the springs, or sitting under the trees, that Mr. Kingsley would join them.

The conversation was pleasant when all three were together,—but pleasanter when General Seaton came, and the party divided itself. Ada became quite unconsciously more animated, and expatiated considerably (led on by Kingsley) on her own life and thoughts. A significant fact which entirely escaped Ada's observation.

"I always see you bowing to people, but you never seem to speak to them," Ada said to Kingsley one day. "Why don't you?"

"Most of them are stupid and not worth the trouble."

"And you think yourself quite different?"

"So I am," he said quietly.

"In what way? As I don't know other people here the distinction is lost on me, unless you explain."

"I know exactly what most of those people would say, and to a great extent what they think. Every one of

them would try to make some sort of an impression on me, and would skilfully watch to see how deep it was."

Ada smiled.

"I suppose I may say that I think that a very conceited notion?"

"You may say it if you like, but you are wrong. You do not understand me. It is not that they care for *my* admiration specially. I know it is not worth much, many men's is worth less; therefore any one who would make efforts to win the admiration of outsiders like me, and would care for me more or less according to the worship I give, is quite stupid. Is it not so?"

"Not quite. It is pleasant to see that people like you, or even admire you. What is the good of talking to people who are quite indifferent to you. I dare say if I knew a great many people I should like to make a pleasant impression on them all, so you may add me to the list of idiotic people whom you despise, and whom you are not at all like!"

"I won't," Kingsley said emphatically.

In this brief sentence you may have an excellent example of how the conversation differed in tone when carried on between two instead of three, and of how rapidly their intimacy had progressed.

"You scarcely know any one here," he continued, "so you cannot judge whether you would care to make a pleasant impression on them or not."

"Oh! yes, I can. When I first came I did not want to know any one; I told papa we were just as well without friends, but I was wrong; it is much pleasanter since we have known you."

In her anxiety to prove her case, Ada did not quite see how complimentary she was.

Kingsley smiled.

"I don't think you are aware how you have, by your last words, ministered to the conceit you complain of!"

"Not at all, I simply mean that it is better to talk to some one than no one, and that 'l'appetit vient en mangeant.'"

She looked up at him with the most provoking expression.

"So," he said, "you really want to know more people to make a 'pleasant impression' upon them, and you are encouraged in that idea by the inward assurance that you have made a 'pleasant impression' on me! It is the most barefaced statement I ever heard!"

Ada laughed in a most unabashed way.

"Nevertheless quite true."

"And that is all you want friends for, to admire you?"

"I did not say so. I should prefer admiring them. I think the great good of knowing people is that amongst them all you must find many that are finer, nobler, and cleverer than yourself."

Kingsley looked amused, not impressed with this outburst of Ada's, and of course she did not like it.

"You should never laugh when any one is in earnest," she said gravely.

"I was only thinking that you will modify that humility when you are older."

"I am sure I shall not. There must be something wise in every one if you take the pains to find it out. If I thought that everyone was petty and contemptible, it would be horrible! There would be nothing to stretch to or try for. If I found every one like that, I think the fault would be in myself."

"I am quite content to wait and see what your judg-

ment will be when you know all these mythical personages. I shall not see, however, for goodness knows where I shall be then."

"My friend Mrs. Bruton is coming to-morrow, and when she is here I dare say I shall make a great many more acquaintances."

This announcement did not seem to please or interest Kingsley, for he made no comment thereon; Ada, girl-like, thought he ought to be interested, and added,

"I don't think you will find her stupid unless you are determined to find every one so."

"I am not at all determined about anything; I wish I were," Kingsley said in a lazy tone. Then he drifted far away in thought, but presently came back again, and looking at Ada, who was sitting so quietly beside him, thought he might as well go on talking to her.

"Will you tell me about your friend? Is she pretty?"

"Very," said Ada, enthusiastically; "she has bright golden hair and blue eyes, and I think most people who saw her could not help looking at her a second time."

"And you are fast friends? So firm that nothing can ever break the bonds?"

He smiled in a teasing sort of way.

"Why should it? You would not think of giving up your friends, would you?"

"I never had one, except my father, and he is dead."

Such a kindly, wistful expression came into Ada's face at his words. Kingsley tried to think it absurd, but somehow she looked prettier than usual at that moment.

A little change in Ada's feeling towards Kingsley unconsciously followed from this time. He had given her an entry into his loneliness, a glance into a life very different from her own. Perhaps he read her expression,

and wished her to understand that the sympathy of a foolish young girl was not at all sought for, by his words, for he added in a minute,

“ I should think six months was the utmost limit of a young lady’s friendship.”

“ Why not say six hours? As you know all about these things, please enlighten me as to what is usually the cause of rupture in young ladies’ friendship; I might avoid it!”

“ Impossible. It comes so unexpectedly. It is not a romantic sense of wrong,” (dropping his voice to a mysterious solemnity). “ It is not a misunderstanding from the interference of some viperish third person. It is the quite commonplace failing of—jealousy!

Though Ada laughed at his ridiculous tone of voice, she was very indignant at his words, and was ready to rise up in justification of the whole young lady species at once, and say the most foolish things about them.

“ You must be very unlucky in the girls you know if that is your opinion of them,” she said at last, not finding anything more severe, and thinking this a very valiant thrust.

Kingsley secretly approved her wrath, though he continued to irritate her.

“ I have known a great many delightful girls” (Ada began to speculate about them directly), “ but I am bound to speak truthfully. Suppose at school you had always been the favourite, always put before your friend in everything—do you think she would have liked it?”

“ I don’t think she would have cared. She often praised me for things she could not do; my better knowledge of languages, for instance, and often said I was cleverer than herself.”

“ And made use of your cleverness immediately after that little speech ? ”

“ I helped her sometimes, but anyone would have done that.”

Kingsley gave a little “ hem,” which was most satisfactory to himself and most irritating to Ada.

“ And suppose,” he continued, “ you had met your friend’s *fiancé*—Tom, Jack, or whatever his name might have been.”

“ Charlie,” Ada put in as if it was of much importance.

“ And he had paid you a great deal of attention, would the fair Kate have liked it ? ”

“ She would not have minded it a bit unless she was very silly. What could it matter ? He was in love with her, so he could not be in love with me.”

Ada evidently considered this last question of Kingsley’s quite answered.

“ That is founded on the theory that it is impossible to change—a very beautiful theory, no doubt, but, alas, quite untenable.”

“ Untenable sounds very grand and as if it ought to suppress me at once, but it does not ; and in order to carry out my theory—which is a much prettier one than yours—I shall cling to all my notions most persistently.”

“ And your notions on love and marriage are ? ” asked Kingsley, with considerable coolness.

Ada thought it was quite her turn to laugh.

“ Don’t you know ? You who are so well versed in the ways and manners of girls ! ”

“ No.”

“ As young ladies are evidently in the habit of pouring into your ear their inmost thoughts, it would be a pity if

I formed an exception! Being very romantic and full of untenable theories, I should like a tournament to be held in my honour, and some unknown knight to enter the lists in a beautiful coat, and fighting valiantly, to win me, and that when his visor was raised he should be as lovely as a god, and ever after be my loyal knight and most devoted slave!"

"Part of it is sure to be as you desire, though you laugh," Kingsley said, with a very legible look of admiration. "I have no doubt that men will enter the lists for you, though it is more than probable that they will try to trip up their adversaries in a cowardly way when they are not looking, rather than break their lances in fair fight. As to the rest of the story—"

He shrugged his shoulders as a conclusion to his sentence.

Colonel St. George and his friend had been sitting close to Ada, and afterwards they walked up and down near her, but now they had totally disappeared. Of this fact Ada was quite unconscious till Kingsley called her attention to it. She rose at once.

"How funny of papa to forget me. I must go home."

"Yes, it must be getting late, for I am uncommonly hungry."

Greatly against her will, Ada had to admit to herself that she felt a little piqued that Mr. Kingsley should have been the first to suggest moving. She had been very comfortable and enjoying his conversation, but he had evidently found her so childish and unimportant that breakfast was a much greater attraction. She betrayed that she had stepped into this phase of grownupness by saying abruptly,—*"Good-bye. It is later than I thought. I must hurry home."*

He got up quite leisurely.

"The dangers of the walks are not great, but I do not see why I should not see you to your own door."

Ada started off at a very rapid pace, and Kingsley expostulated.

"Why so fast? It is not at all a cold morning!"

"I want to get home."

"Oh! very well, I will step out," he said quite gravely.

In a few minutes his long strides left her some way behind. Then he stood still till she came up with him, very much pleased with his little joke.

"I really did not think you were such a child," she said laughing.

"I have tired you, though," he said quickly; "you look quite pale."

Something in his tone gave Ada a feeling of contentment for the rest of the walk home.

"By the way," said Kingsley, as they stood at the door together, "how do you get on with Dumas?"

"I have read all the 'Château d'If' and part of 'Monte Christo.' They are delightful."

"I thought you would like Dumas greatly. Remember, there are more books for you if you should want them;" and with a little wave of the hand he turned away.

Involuntarily Ada paused a second and watched him disappear. When she entered the sitting-room, breakfast was on the table but untouched, and her father seemed in earnest conversation with General Seaton. She stood for a moment with the handle of the door in her hand; then Colonel St. George looked up.

"That you, Fairy? I am talking business with

General Seaton; will you run away for a little while, dear?"

So Ada disappeared and betook herself to her own room, where she leaned her arms very idly on the window-sill, and wondered what they were talking about, and why she was not allowed to be present. She puzzled her head for a long time and could not arrive at it. It is wonderful how far we are sometimes from guessing a thing when it is quite plain to be seen. Ada imagined all sorts of things, each new solution of the difficulty being further from the truth than the previous one. At last she found it too much trouble to think any more about it, and her thoughts turned to Mr. Kingsley. She began making a story about him. He had been an only child, the pet of his parents; now they were dead and he was alone in the world. He had loved some one, perhaps, and she had not behaved well to him, and so he had grown indifferent and cynical. Perhaps some friend had misunderstood him and acted unjustly, and so everything had been bitter and sad for him in life. She felt sure that something worried him. She went on to think childishly, but with a touch of womanly tenderness, that perhaps she might make the world brighter for him. She did not know how, but vaguely she felt that she might somehow soften his views of life. Do not all things seem possible to the yearning instinct of tenderness in a woman's heart?

Brightly Ada pictured all the little occurrences of the coming days, as she leaned on the window-sill and looked dreamily into the courtyard. She was sure Kate Bruton would like Mr. Kingsley, and she fancied herself going through the ceremony of introduction with a certain air of pride and proprietorship. Would Kate be here in

time for the *table d'hôte*? She hoped so. When we are young and all life is before us how eager we are for the smallest events. When we are old and the time is short how leisurely we carry out our schemes!

What a pleasant party they would be at dinner. This wonderful Charlie, Ada had not seen him, but he must be charming from Kate's account. She had not yet observed that girls have got a way of dressing up in pleasing attributes a being they call "lover," and carrying him always in their mind. When the reality comes and does not correspond with their ideal type, they turn their backs on him and continue to contemplate their pet, and persuade themselves that the two are identical. It is not such a bad plan after all.

Ada was disturbed in her ponderings by her father, who put his head in at the door, and said,—

"Fairy, the breakfast will be quite cold, come along."

"I am starving," she answered; "you have nearly been the death of me!"

"General Seaton is going away," Colonel St. George said, as they sat down to breakfast.

"Is he? I am very sorry, you will miss him. What have you been talking about all this time?"

"Business, dear, you could not understand."

Ada shrugged her shoulders.

"It is very hard that I should be thought a perfect nonentity!"

Colonel St. George smiled in a tired way, and did not seem to think the subject worth discussion.

"Did Mr. Kingsley bring you home?" he asked presently.

"Yes. A pretty way you rushed off, leaving me 'a perfect nonentity' to take care of myself!"

"How do you like Mr. Kingsley?"

"Very much; he is very nice," she said eagerly.

She was much too simple to conceal what she thought. She had not been driven as yet into saying what she did not mean.

"He seems to me commonplace enough. What do you find attractive in him?"

"I don't know. He is very kind, and talks nicely, and I am sure he is very clever."

"Does he admire you, Fairy? Is not that the real secret of it?"

"I do not know."

"Pooh, child, you are not such a baby as not to know if a man admires you."

"He never pays me a compliment, he generally scolds me."

"Uncommonly impertinent! Why do you allow him? There—that's what I always say; a girl of your age does not know how to treat a man."

"He is not a bit impertinent," she said flushing hotly, "he is quite gentlemanly and nice."

"My dear child," her father said, soothingly, "it is natural enough that I should think so. For a man to find fault even in a playful way with a young lady whom he has known such a short time as Mr. Kingsley has known you, he must be rather presuming."

"It depends on the way it is done. If you knew Mr. Kingsley better you would see I am right."

Colonel St. George was silent, he was thinking sadly of the future. Some danger seemed to threaten Ada. How could he ward it off? Who was this presuming stranger that he should fill his child's head, and that she should feel called upon to defend him? An acquaint-

tance of but a fortnight's growth at most,—it was too ridiculous!

Ada was breaking up her toast into little bits and letting it drop on her plate, was stirring her tea round in an aimless way, and was looking cross.

"Fairy," Colonel St. George said, in a few minutes, glancing at her nervously, "is this man in love with you?"

"No, of course not," she answered, brusquely, another hot flush coming in her face.

"Are you in love with him?"

"Certainly not."

Then seeing that her father did not immediately speak, she went on impatiently, "What is the good of talking in this way? Why do you ask me all these questions, and make me feel uncomfortable? Can I not like Mr. Kingsley and enjoy talking to him, without fancying that he is falling in love with me? Why, it is like those dreadful girls at school, who thought every one was heart-broken on their account!"

Poor Colonel St. George! He began to feel that he had not chosen the most judicious way of speaking to Ada. He wished that Mr. Kingsley was at the bottom of the sea with a millstone about his neck, or any other heavy substance, likely to prevent him from re-appearing!

"My dear child, I may be forgiven for fancying that every one *must* admire you. If your dear mother were alive, it is to her you would speak about these things. As we have been such friends, Fairy, I foolishly fancied that we could continue to be frank on all subjects, and that I could supply the place of your mother."

"But, daddy," Ada said in despair, the tears in her

eyes, "there is nothing at all to tell you, really—really. I like Mr. Kingsley—so would you if you knew him better—but that is all, and of course I tell you everything and shall always, and I wish you would not worry yourself about nothing at all."

At that moment Ada was almost inclined to wish that she had never seen Mr. Kingsley.

Colonel St. George sighed, looked at his child and smiled a little. Was it not possible for the two minds to understand each other? How he dreaded lest he should be like most fathers, who see nothing but their own views of life; who, in the tempered light of declining years, forget utterly the glory of early day. How gladly would he have stood near his motherless child and have caught the morning glow on her young heart, if so he could feel as she felt and learn how to speak to her. But present personal feeling is very powerful, we cannot sweep it away. In Colonel St. George's memory rose up this morning, histories of ruined lives—young, beautiful women who carried in their hearts remorse and regret. In contrast he thought of his own wife, who had been brought up in the seclusion of a convent, been married to him as a mere child, and loving him entirely, had died ignorant of sin and sorrow. Always the friend and confidant of his child, it suddenly became difficult for him to speak to her without a mutual misunderstanding. Whence had it grown up, this shadow of a something which separated them? Surely the cause was not in the trivial acquaintance of a mere passer-by? Was all this a fancy of his, conjured up by his jealous love for his child? It was for such a little while he would have all—all her heart.

"Fairy," he said, "I wish you could see into my old

heart; it is so difficult to explain things to you." He got up as he spoke—feebly—and stood beside her. "You and I are so entirely alone, so much to one another, that as I grow old I forget that life is only beginning for you, and that I cannot expect an old head on young shoulders. I cannot expect worldly prudence and long-sightedness.

"I suppose it would not be natural," he added with a sigh; "but try to imagine what a different view of life from you, an old man takes, who has seen the mistake, the foolishness and the unhappiness of most women's lives, and indeed of most men's also."

Here he stopped and kissed her forehead.

"If your mother had only lived, dear child."

A certain sense of loneliness came over Ada, she knew not why, but she felt a choky sensation in her throat, as she said, "Dear dad, you are father and mother and everything to me."

Then growing impatient with herself and with the dreary turn the conversation was taking, she said quickly,—

"What has made us so mopy this morning? Of course I see into your heart, and I shall be so wise; only you must trust me a little. I am not quite a baby, am I?"

Her father acquiesced and felt more at ease.

"By the way, dear," he said, sitting down again, "your friend comes to-day, does she not?"

"Yes, she may have arrived this morning. I shall run across to the hotel to see if she is there. Will you come?"

"No, you will have a great deal of girls' chatter for one another, I should be de trop. Tell your friend to come to the *Kursaal table d'hôte* and then you can introduce me."

CHAPTER X.

FRIEND OR FOE?

WONDERINGLY Ada walked to see Kate Bruton. Would she be different now that she was married? She thought about their school-life and the impression Kate had made upon her in those days. Why was it that she could not quite fix her ideas about her. A misty notion that Kate was delightful and that she liked her, dwelt in Ada's mind, but she could take no comprehensive grasp of her character, form no distinct idea of the effect which Kate produced on herself and others. It seemed strange. Was it that in those few months her own mind had matured and her past judgment seemed insufficient for the present? Thus pondering, Ada came to the hotel and asked for Mrs. Bruton timidly. She was shown at once into a little salon, where she found Kate, who embraced her in foreign fashion. The two girls stood for a minute looking at one another.

"How you do stare, my dear girl," Kate said playfully, tossing back a ringlet which fell on her shoulder. "Am I changed?"

"No—yes—" said Ada hesitatingly.

Kate was dressed most fashionably in a morning gown of studied negligence; from a coquettish school-girl she had developed suddenly into a woman of fashion, and yet she was the same.

“What does that mean? Do you think I have grown a fright?” Mrs. Bruton said.

“No,” said Ada, laughing. “I think you are prettier.”

“Perhaps my style of coiffure alters me. Sit down and take off your hat.”

“And Mr. Bruton?” Ada asked.

“Oh, Charlie, he will come in presently. How do you amuse yourself here? What do you do all day?”

“We go to the springs in the morning, and sit under the trees in the afternoon.”

“Do you know many people here?”

“No. Papa is not well enough to visit, so we have only left cards on those who have called.”

“Mon Dieu, how dull you must be!”

“No, not at all.”

“Well,” continued Kate, taking no notice of what Ada had said, “now that I have come, you can go out with me.”

As she said this, she looked at Ada critically. “How tall you’ve grown! Let me see if there is much difference between us. Stand up before the mirror.”

Ada obeyed, and they stood together.

“What a little woman I am!” Kate exclaimed as she looked at their reflection side by side.

Her small, perfectly rounded figure did not lose any of its attraction beside Ada. She saw that. She also saw that Ada’s peculiar kind of beauty did not at all extinguish her own, or deaden the brilliancy of her Saxon face. Perhaps that was the reason she said more emphatically,—

“Yes, Ada, it is a good thing I have come; you looked moped to death. We must have some fun together.”

"I am not at all dull, Kate."

"By the way I forgot you have a knack of not making friends. Do you remember the school-days? You never got on with the girls."

"No wonder. They were such insipid, mincing things, and had such silly ways."

"As you consider me an honourable exception, I can't say anything. Do you remember Madame Dubois? You see she was right, I have married Charlie."

"I want to see him."

"Oh, he is nothing wonderful."

"He was an angel of light in the school-days!"

"Ah, yes, but I am accustomed to him now. Here he is."

A horsey-looking man with a stalwart English figure, a face burnt-brick colour, indefinite features with a heavy expression, thick moustache, and a thick curly beard of a wiry description, such was Mr. Bruton. He did not see Ada at first.

"I say, Katie," he said to his wife, "nothing but a damned lot of screws in this beastly hole; I wish we had brought over our own horses."

Then perceiving Ada he said, in just the same tone, his voice being incapable of inflection,—

"I beg your pardon. You are Kate's friend, Miss St. George, I suppose."

Ada held out her hand and introduction was dispensed with. She mentally corroborated Kate's statement. Charlie was certainly nothing wonderful! He made some brilliant remarks about the weather being "beastly hot" and then subsided, his wife taking up the conversation.

"Where do you dine, Ada?"

"At the Kursaal. And that reminds me that I want you to dine there too. Papa wishes to meet you."

"Very well, we shall go."

"Charlie," she said, turning to her husband, "what are the others going to do?"

"How can I tell? I suppose they will turn up presently."

"Then we can all go together, and we shall be a nice little party."

"Now I must dismiss you, Ada," she added, "for I must dress—unless you will stay with Charlie while I am dressing, and lunch with us after?"

"I cannot, papa will expect me."

So Ada rose to go. Kate vanished into her bed-room, kissing the tips of her fingers and saying "au revoir."

As Ada walked home, she naturally thought a good deal about her friend. She wondered why Kate had that funny manner with her husband, and why she (Ada) felt awkward and shy in her society; but after all these wonderings she still clung to the hazy notion that Kate was "nice," and that she liked her very much.

They all strolled into the Kursaal dining-room at the same time—the Brutons and two friends of theirs, Ada, her father, and Mr. Kingsley. Mr. Bruton was going to sit next Ada, but Kingsley put him quietly aside, saying—

"Excuse me, I think this is my place."

Kingsley seemed to know one of the Bruton party, a Mr. Falkner, for he nodded to him as he sat down; Ada noticed that it seemed the veriest shadow of acknowledgment.

The first part of the dinner was passed in true British fashion, grumbling at the food. Kate displayed such a depth of knowledge as to cooking deficiencies that Ada

quite marvelled, having known her at school to have been possessed of a very liberal taste.

"I have often heard my daughter speak of you," Colonel St. George said to Mrs. Bruton.

"Yes, Ada and I were what school-boys call 'great chums.' I can scarcely believe it is but four months since we were learning our lessons together. I have been married quite a long time, and Ada looks quite grown up and a great deal prettier."

Kate could not have found a more direct way of fascinating Colonel St. George than by praising his child.

"Yes, she grows very like her mother" (to him the standard of all beauty). "It is lonely for her, poor child; your coming will be a great pleasure to her."

"Has she not made friends here?"

"No. I am not quite up to going about with her and seeing people. I am sorry to say I have become rather an invalid of late years."

"Who is that sitting next Ada?"

She had been looking across the table, and had caught Kingsley's eye several times, but had not made up her mind whether his scrutiny was very flattering.

"That is a Mr. Kingsley; he was an officer in the 79th, but has sold out, I believe."

"Like my husband. I trust," she said, turning to Falkner who was on her right, "that he is not such an awful nuisance to himself and his friends as Charlie is!"

Charlie seemed to enjoy the joke immensely and to be rather proud of a wife who was so amusing.

"Not six months married," said Falkner, "and you express such opinions; alas, for modern romance."

“How funny it is,” she said, raising her voice slightly, “I think nearly all of our party are officers,” she looked round as if inviting any or all to join in the conversation.

“It always happens wherever I go,” she continued, “I hear nothing but this sort of thing,—So and so of the 10th, capital fellow. Do you know Johnson of the 4th? Splendid judge of a horse!—and if one mentions any event, the date is discovered thus,—Ah, that must have been when our regiment was quartered at Agra or some other place. Is it not so?”

Every one laughed, and Kate thought herself amusing.

“I am afraid,” said Colonel St. George, “you very justly accuse us soldiers of talking shop. It does not much matter when men are together, but in ladies’ society it is very bad taste.”

“I like officers very much,” said Ada to Kingsley in her quiet low voice, which after the ring of Kate’s sounded particularly agreeable to him.

“Perhaps because you know very little about them.”

“My father is an officer,” she said with dignity, thinking Kingsley must feel very much reprovèd; “besides, as a child I went everywhere with papa’s regiment, and I recollect how kind they were.”

“All officers are not like Colonel St. George. Some of the greatest ruffians I ever knew are in the service.”

“There is very little esprit-de-corps in the army nowadays, I am sorry to say,” said Falkner, who had overheard Kingsley’s last words. Indeed he had been paying special attention to his conversation with Ada since the beginning of dinner.

“I don’t think we are angels, any of us,” he added, “but I rather fancy we can bear comparison with any other set of men in the world.”

"But then, dear Mr. Falkner," said Kate, taking him up, "your excellent opinion of yourself will bear comparison with that of any other man in the world."

Mr. Falkner evidently liked the imputation, and received her speech with a bow and a sort of challenging glance, half of admiration for her, half for himself.

Ada wondered at Kate's flippancy, was amused, but could not help thinking that she would not have liked to say those things. She wanted to know what Mr. Kingsley thought of Kate, and had been expecting some comment.

"Don't you think my friend pretty?" she said at last.

"Very," he answered in a tone which did not at all convey that he thought so.

Kate was looking across the table at them and smiling at Ada sweetly, in a manner meant to convey to lookers-on that there was a mutual understanding of great affection between them.

"Is that her husband on her left?"

"Yes."

"How kind fate has been to her! He is just the sort of apathetic, obedient husband to suit her; no brains, no nerves, and proud of his wife in a heavy sort of untouchable way. Mrs. Bruton is the last kind of person I should have fancied as your intimate friend," he added, taking no notice of Ada's look of astonishment.

"I should have thought you knew me too slightly to form any idea on the subject."

"One cannot help conjecturing things," he answered quietly, "and I never was so far wrong. I imagined a very simple girlish creature with perhaps little intellect,

but warm-hearted, and clinging to you because you are cleverer and stronger than herself."

"And what is your opinion of Mrs. Bruton?" asked Ada, forgetting her dignity in her surprise and curiosity.

"Just the reverse of all this."

At this moment the subject of their conversation leaned forward and said,—

"Ada, I've been scolding Colonel St. George for not amusing you more, and he gives you up to me in future."

"Heaven forbid!" Kingsley said in a low tone.

This demand for the interposition of Providence roused Ada's indignation somewhat! She began to think that perhaps her father was right and Mr. Kingsley was presuming.

"My friend is very kind," she said quickly, flushing slightly as she spoke. "I have known her for a long time, and I do not like to hear any one condemn her. Of course a stranger's opinion is not of the least consequence. No one can judge of another person after a few minutes' acquaintance, though they may think themselves wise enough to do so."

"What was the origin of your friendship? Why did you like her?" asked Kingsley, taking no notice of her remark, and with the faintest smile on his face.

"We were always friends from the first. She was very kind to me."

"Did she help you with your studies?"

Ada laughed.

"Oh! no, she was much too idle to learn herself."

"Then you helped her?"

"Yes, when I could."

"Ah! I thought so. And when you got into any

scrapes together, on whom did the brunt of the blame fall ?
On you ? ”

“ Sometimes. Kate was such a favourite, she was seldom scolded.”

“ I understand. Well, you must forgive me, but I don’t think I like your friend, and now that she has come, I suppose I shall not see you very often ? ”

“ I shall be with Mrs. Bruton a great deal.”

“ I am sorry,” he said in a low tone.

After this the conversation became more general and continued so till the end of dinner.

As they sauntered through the gardens, Kingsley, who had been walking beside Ada in silence, said suddenly,

“ I suppose you are going to rush into all sorts of amusements now that you will have Mrs. Bruton to go out with ? ”

“ I don’t know. I shall see more people probably, and perhaps go to a ball or two, but I do not think there is anything else to do.”

“ Your friendship for Mrs. Bruton,” he said after a minute or two, “ is to be a most enduring thing ? ”

“ I suppose so. Why should people change ? ”

He laughed.

“ Every one changes. You will be different in a few years ; you will find that there are not the same attractions in your friends which you once saw, and that those people who cease to care for you, you will be able to do without.”

She looked at him incredulously and shook her head.

“ I know it by experience,” he continued. “ I loved a girl once—I was engaged to her—she jilted me. It is not very long ago, and I find I can do very well without her.”

He watched Ada very closely as he spoke.

“And you did not mind? It did not make you unhappy?” she said, with simple astonishment.

“I forget,” he answered as if the subject had no further interest.

CHAPTER XI.

“GATHER YE ROSEBUDS WHILE YE MAY.”

INSTEAD of seeing Ada less often after Mrs. Bruton's arrival, Kingsley saw her much more frequently, but in a different sort of way. The fair and fascinating Kate had quite won Colonel St. George's heart. A due appreciation of Ada on Kate's part, and judicious expression of affection for her, had made the old man's conquest at once.

“A very charming woman, dear,” he had said to his daughter, “and a sensible woman too; I hope you will see a good deal of her while she is here.”

So he had encouraged Ada to be with Mrs. Bruton often. Colonel St. George felt that he could not shut his child out from all society, and that it was better that she should see many people than be thrown exclusively into the society of Kingsley.

Ada became quite gay. There were expeditions to Frankfort, to Manheim, to many places round; parties to the theatre; long drives; long walks, and occasionally rides. To most of these Kingsley was invited and went. Mrs. Bruton duly appreciated him. A good-looking man with a certain well-bred air, he was a pleasant addition to their party always. She tried to impress on Ada that her friend was dull, nevertheless she talked to him a good deal, and Ada observed that Kingsley seemed to

have changed his opinion of Mrs. Bruton and to find her by no means disagreeable.

Two men, Mr. Falkner and Jack Vernon, the latter a young sub. in a marching regiment ; the former, what is vaguely called an independent gentleman, were perpetual attendants on Mrs. Bruton. By-and-bye the list swelled considerably, and at last the term "the Bruton set" came to be applied by outsiders to a goodly number of idlers, English and foreign, who from time to time lounged about Mrs. Bruton's salon ; played billiards with Charlie, and paid court to Kate and Ada. The former was much too shrewd to suppose that a number of men would find it very amusing only to talk to her. She was willing to share their admiration and attention with Ada, knowing well that as the hostess and the originator of their amusements the largest proportion of attention would fall to her ; besides this, she had a higher appreciation of her own attractions than of her friend's, and was satisfied that she would be found the most fascinating. This conclusion was tolerably just, for Ada, except when excited and talkative, had a timid, thoughtful expression in her face, which the "Bruton set" did not understand, and which bored them. With a certain class of men, a woman must be amusing to hold them in bondage. Having no brains of their own, they require the society of those who—recognising the fact—present a series of lively images, of amusing pictures, to them, which are so transparently laughable that they think they have had a hand in the production of them themselves.

Ere long, Kate thought she perceived a tendency to earnestness and sentimentalism in Kingsley's and Ada's friendship. It dawned upon her that there was a faint possibility of these two falling in love with each other,

and this she did not at all approve of. In her own case this falling in love had been a failure. All men were much alike when you found them out. The thing was to enjoy yourself. How could Ada do the part that she had assigned to her, help in general merriment and entertainment, if she sneaked off with Kingsley and talked only to him? Such thoughts in a woman of twenty are ugly, but she had soft eyes and sweet ways, and in such a dress her philosophy was fascinating. She rallied Ada a little about Kingsley one day, and was surprised by Ada's dignity and by the quiet way in which she put the subject aside—not as though it were a point on which she was sensitive, but simply one on which she did not care for any one's opinion. There was a certain unspoken intimation in Ada's manner that Kate, in her friendship, might be "familiar but by no means vulgar." Think you that a woman of Mrs. Bruton's temperament forgives readily a feeling of humiliation?

"I do not mean to be thwarted by a girl like you," thought Kate, "but as you resent a hint, I shall take the matter into my own hands."

Aloud she said sweetly,—

"I shan't tease you, Ada, since it seems a tender subject; you must forgive me, dear, for my little jest."

After this, Kingsley had a great deal of Mrs. Bruton's society, and Ada had a great deal of Kate's friends'. They paid homage readily enough to Miss St. George, and were a little more careful in their selection of compliments. Ada being frank and natural, they were at their best with her, and sometimes made honest efforts, in their brainless way, to amuse her. Little Jack Vernon, a good-natured foolish boy, hung about her, a miserable victim, and for her sake endured a great deal of rough

chaff from Falkner and other men. They envied him the more friendly footing on which he seemed to stand with Ada, for with quick instinct she felt that he was too guileless to misinterpret her words and looks.

These days were quite filled up with idleness and pleasure. Every night as Ada went to bed she told herself that it had been quite a delightful day. There is a certain amount of surface excitement to a young girl in finding herself watched with looks of admiration ; in hearing her words caught up and repeated as if they were full of wit and cleverness (we, men and women, never find people quite stupid who appreciate us), in observing that the most trivial thing she did was praised and thought to have a peculiar charm in it. Gracefully Kate seemed to consider Ada's wishes, and to study to please her. Pondering on all this, was it strange that Ada's thoughts about it were confused, and that the paramount idea as she sank to sleep was, "Will it be pleasant to-morrow? What shall we do?" But all this time there was a restlessness in Ada's heart, and sometimes comparing these days with those previous to Kate's coming, they seemed empty and wearisome. She did not go deep in the analysis of her feelings. She looked forward simply—she scarcely knew why—to each coming day, to each new sensation and thought. A week passed by in this way. Sunday came round, when all Britons at Homburg repaired in a pious way to the English service at the Schloss ; recommencing a gossiping, gaming, slandering week, by prayers on bended knees, with devout face, and eyes observant of new arrivals and new clothes. Mrs. Bruton was very careful of her religious duties. Her fair face and falling curls, bent head and small hands, holding a miniature prayer-book, were seen to

considerable advantage at church, and she was aware of the fact, and scrupulous in her attendance.

This Sunday, with Charlie and Mr. Falkner in her train, Kate started for morning service, determined to go round and call for Ada, whose presence had become quite indispensable to her. Kate was one of those women—they are numerous enough—to whom some girl friend, some satellite, is a necessity of existence; with her, all passages of friendship are carried on playfully in public, giving a pretty and graceful air to their intimacy. Kate chose no ugly companion as a foil, and herein showed a fine tact; not allowing her own vanity or jealousy—both which qualities were pretty strong in her breast—to blind her to the fitness of things. “Comparison is impossible,” thought she, “between us two; let Ada shine if she can, it will be in a way different from me.”

Then Kate had the inward satisfaction of feeling that she was acting quite kindly and generously to this lonely girl, in giving her some amusement and letting her see the world. In proportion as Ada began involuntarily to ask herself whence arose her girlish fancy for Kate, and to wonder at her and at herself, and to feel uncomfortable and unsettled about this friendship, Mrs. Bruton pressed her intimacy on her, always seeming to think of some little plan to give Ada pleasure; always meeting her with some sweet word, the sincerity of which Ada blamed herself for doubting.

Colonel St. George was not so well this Sunday morning; now and then flashes of conviction would come to Ada that her father was not getting better, that he seemed feebler and wearier, and back would come the hateful words of her uncle, which seemed burnt into her memory, and would come out clearly in moments of

emotion like the mark in the faces of the house of Red Gauntlet. The young have great power of thrusting away an unwelcome thought, and Ada remembered having once heard some one say that the good effect of these mineral waters was not apparent till some months after they had been taken. This morning Ada felt peculiarly grateful to the forgotten person who had said this, for she was low; her father was low; everything had dressed itself up in dismal garb during the night, and was presenting itself with much elaboration under this new aspect. She had been reading to her father and now sat silent, book on lap, when Kate ran upstairs and knocked at the door.

"I came to see if you would come to church with me," she said, having kissed Ada and asked Colonel St. George in a tone of much interest how he was.

"I was not going" Ada answered.

"Why not go, dear?" said her father.

The truth was that the old man felt sad at heart, and the presence even of his child demanded an exertion which he could not make.

"I suppose I may as well," she replied, and went to put on her bonnet. Anything, even church, might shake off the gloomy fit that had settled on her to-day.

When they went down they found Mr. Bruton and Mr. Falkner waiting. They fell into two divisions; Kate and Mr. Falkner in front, Ada and Charlie behind. Certainly Ada's companion was not likely to enliven her much; he was more than usually heavy and discontented.

"It is so confoundedly hot," he said, in his customary strong language, "and Kate goes at such a devil of a rate; don't let's hurry ourselves."

So Mrs. Bruton was soon a long way ahead of them.

A short distance from the Schloss, Kingsley strolled up to them.

"Where are you people going?" he asked as he shook hands.

"To church, worse luck," answered Charlie.

"Do you like church, Miss St. George?" asked Kingsley with a funny smile.

They were standing under the shade of a big tree, and Charlie did not look as if he meant "to hurry himself."

"No," said Ada forcibly.

"At least," she added, "rarely, and only in certain frames of mind."

"Do you want to go to-day particularly?"

"No."

She could not have said any more. She was not in a talkative humour.

"By Jove," said Charlie with a heavy laugh, "that is a happy thought! Let's not go. Kate is halfway through the Litany now, it will give her a nice little amusement looking out for us during the rest of the service."

Kingsley objected to Mr. Bruton; morally and physically overlooked him; but to-day he was in an amiable mood, and seemed to find his remark laughable; he however did not speak to him, only turned to Ada, saying, "What do you think of a walk? It must be rather pleasant up in the wood."

He glanced towards the opposite hill, where a soft wind waved the topmost branches of the trees.

"My dear fellow," exclaimed Charlie, "a walk on a day like this! Not for me, thank you."

"Then what do you propose doing?"

Kingsley spoke to him directly for perhaps the first

time since they had met, and looked, as plainly as looks can speak, "Well, what can that wretched brain of yours suggest?"

"I think I'll take a turn at the tables. I dropped a lot of money last night at rouge-et-noir; better luck to-day perhaps."

Kingsley turned towards the Kursaal, the others following naturally.

"You coming too?" Charlie asked at the door.

"No," answered Kingsley, "Miss St. George and I will take a walk."

"Very glad to hear it, I hate being watched. Ta-ta!"
He disappeared.

"Mein Gott!" exclaimed Kingsley, with a little sneer and a shrug of the shoulders. Ada did not answer. Presently Kingsley said,—

"It won't tire you to walk, will it? The sun is hot."

"No. It will be refreshing under the trees; I shall like it; but look at your watch, please, and do not let me be later home than half-past one."

Kingsley looked at his watch.

"Are you likely to forget the time?"

"Yes."

"Well, I shall try to remember it. How is Colonel St. George to-day?"

"Not well," she said, looking up at him quickly and inquiringly, as if he might have some secret knowledge of his state of health.

"You look worried, are you anxious about him?"

"Yes, he looks so weary sometimes."

Ada felt it a relief to speak to some one about him, and the quick sympathy which made Kingsley see that she was sad, touched her.

"Has he good advice?"

"Yes, the best doctor here. Do you think he looks ill?"

"Sometimes, perhaps, a little worn and troubled."

Kingsley could not deceive her.

"I know so little about illness; mamma was the only one I ever saw ill, and she died when I was so young, I seem ignorant, helpless, and useless. I can only sit and stare at my father, and make a long face."

Kingsley smiled.

"That won't do him much good. Do you read to him?"

"Yes, but we have no books here that he likes."

"I'll find you some—some books of travel about countries where he has been himself, so that he may contradict or corroborate the accounts; that gives a man a personal interest in a book. Where has your father travelled?"

"At the Cape; in Italy, in China, in India."

"On military service, I suppose, at all these places except Italy?"

"Yes. He went to Italy with my mother, the year after they were married. It was her country."

"Yes, you told me you were half Italian."

"Don't I look it?"

"I do not know. You do not look quite English, and I suppose you are proud of it."

"Perhaps so."

"You think all Saxons dull, phlegmatic, without one spark of wit?"

"You cannot think I am so silly!" she answered indignantly; "there are plenty of nice Englishmen. I find English women dull, but then I can scarcely judge,

I know so few intimately. Our neighbours call and pay us dreary visits. Girls come with their mothers, and have such dull faces, and talk in such a dreary way about gardening and embroidery, or the last fashionable valse that has penetrated to the country. Others that have been in London during the season, talk of drawing-rooms, and court balls and keep referring to their mothers in this way, "You remember, mamma, what Lord Harton said about afternoon teas?" I sit and listen, and try to show sufficient interest, and find myself sometimes with a fixed smile on my face, having laughed from politeness and forgotten it."

"I wonder what they say of you when they leave."

"That Miss St. George is half foolish, and they put it down probably to the fact that my mother was an Italian."

"Do you think that Italy and imbecility are connected in the British mind?"

"No, I do not mean that, but they are very glad to attribute anything they do not approve of to a foreign origin. I will tell you what is very funny. All our neighbours have a fixed idea that mamma was an actress. My father saw her on the stage, fell in love with her and married her; that is the popular story."

"And the true one?" he said simply.

"My mother was brought up in a convent; taken to the Cape for her health, and there papa met her and married her. I wish she had been an artiste of some kind, for then her talent might have descended to me."

"You are intelligent and clever enough; you have a very happy life; are admired, and loved. What more do you want?" He looked at her curiously as he spoke.

She was silent for a moment, then looked at him earnestly.

“Would that satisfy you?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“I don’t know. I have never enjoyed any of those luxuries.”

“Do you not really think that the possession of any one talent in an unusual degree, and the cultivation of it, would be an infinitely greater happiness—even though one might have a sad life in other ways—than the calm enjoyment of kindness, love, and admiration, and the peaceful life that many people of limited intelligence have?”

They had reached the hill and the wood now, and Ada sat down on a stone and took off her hat. Kingsley had broken off a little branch from a tree, and was carving it with his knife leaning his back against an oak trunk.

“Poor child,” he said, looking down at her, “what do you know of a sad life, or whether the glories of genius make up for it? We all say those foolish things when we are young and happy; how is it when men are older and have achieved fame, they look back with yearning to the simple pleasures they thought nothing of once?”

“Because they do not know what they want; have never known what they wanted. Besides, why should we think nothing of simple pleasures; they are nice always, though not the chief things.”

How freshly and enthusiastically she looked out on life; no affectation of worldliness or indifference. Was it her nature, or a part she had lent herself to in the excitement of the moment, and in finding herself listened to with attention? So questioned Kingsley mentally, leaning against the tree and still shaping the piece of wood.

“And so,” he said in a tone half grave, half mocking, “you would choose to be a woman of genius, even though it might bring you a life of sorrow?”

“Yes.”

He looked at the soft delicacy of her features, quite untouched by bodily or mental suffering. He noticed, as he had often done before, the sort of dreamy sadness in her eyes. What was her life going to be?

She looked up at him suddenly with a smile,—

“I should prefer being a man of genius,” she said.

“Why?”

“Because men are less cooped up in thought and action, their life is altogether broader and finer.”

“But women, being more delicate and refined in their emotions and perceptions, ought to have a corresponding executive power, which ought to make all art, on which such qualities bear, more perfect.”

“A frivolous life and desultory education make that delicacy and refinement, weakness.”

“Those impediments can be done away with, can't they?”

“I don't know.”

They did not speak for a little while; then Kingsley said,—“Why should you think that you have no special talent for anything?”

“It ought to have developed itself by this time,” she answered, laughing.

“Not necessarily. An aptitude, a knack for certain things, displays itself in childhood in some people, not in all. Some minds require a deep, broad culture before their powers are determined—just as an entire body of water must be reduced to a certain temperature before ice comes on its surface.”

“Yes, perhaps, but my culture is not likely to be broad or deep; my knowledge, if I learn anything, will be picked up here and there in an erratic, unguided sort of way.”

“But you have read a good deal, thought a good deal; far more than most girls; more than I expected.”

Kingsley was surprised to hear her talk so seriously. For the last week he had seen her much with Falkner, Vernon, and such men, and apparently she had found something to talk to them about, and probably would again. Was this only a freak—a passing interest, going no deeper than a discussion on a ball or a dress? What was the good of cavilling always? He would look at things to-day as they seemed.

“I suppose you thought I read nothing but novels! Was that the reason you lent me Dumas?”

“No; and novels are not by any means to be despised; his are full of imagination and life. There are books reputed to be deep and learned, out of which it is impossible to extract one particle of pleasure or profit. I can lend you books, if you like, books of real worth, which ought to be read every line of them.”

“Though I have been at school, I feel now that I am so terribly ignorant that if I am ever to know anything I ought to begin at the very beginning, and plod through all that most school-boys know.”

“No, no, that’s no use now. I grant you that all that acquisition of facts and the roots of things ought to have grown with your growth, without much mental effort, but I do not see the use of turning back to that now; it might make you with labour a scholar, but not a genius.”

“Then how would you study?” she said earnestly.

Hazily, distantly, the uninvestigated shores of truth and

knowledge showed themselves to Ada's mind. They were beautiful to her young eyes. She was eager to stand there and breathe the air which is full of life and wonder.

"I don't know, I cannot give any rules. I take a man of letters—an 'inspired man,' as Carlyle calls him—and hear all that he can say to me. If there is truth and reality in any one work of his, I want to know all his thoughts; I want to pursue him through his life, in his writings; to think over him; to dispute with him; to learn from him, before I go into a new presence. Then new thoughts do not displace the old, and leave a jumbled chaos in my mind. I learn a great deal in this way. But what is best for me may not be best for you."

"Yes, I dare say it would; I'll try to take your advice."

"In your quiet life in England you can learn, you can develop your own powers. It is not like the empty stupid existence of fashionables, who are interested in mere external pleasures."

"Yes, but I like pleasure, I enjoy things that you would think silly. On a bright day I could fling down the finest work that ever was written, and rush out."

"But you would learn from nature; that is not idleness."

"Ah, but it is not only that which attracts me; the most trivial and frivolous pleasures I enjoy—a party, a dance—everything excites me and amuses me, and seems all-important—for the time."

She looked at him timidly as if she expected to be scolded. He smiled with a wondrously gentle look in his eyes. Then he came close to her, holding out the piece of wood he had been carving.

“Look at my angel,” he said, “do you like her; do you think her a pretty angel?”

She stretched her hand and he gave it to her, but as he gave it he kept his hand closed on hers. He saw the faintest colour steal into her face and felt her hand tremble in his; but she did not seem to notice that he held her hand.

“You did all that in such a short time,” she exclaimed.

“What a nice angel, may I keep it?”

“Would you like it? Of course you may keep it, but I have not finished it. I will finish it and give it to you.”

He was kneeling on one knee beside her—could see the soft, faint bloom on her fair young skin—could look into the quiet depths of her eyes, now full of a tremulous light—could note the caressing wave of her bright hair, which wooed the touch of a loving hand. As she spoke, her breath, blent with the summer air, passed over his face. If he had only spoken then, the words which were in his heart and on his lips! If a cold fear and distrust had not checked the passionate tenderness in his eyes! Was he sure of himself or of her? As he asked himself the question, he took the little carved figure and put it in his pocket. Ada got up with a vague kind of sadness in her heart.

“Do you think,” Kingsley said, after a long silence, as they walked homeward, “that two people, thrown together by chance for a week, a month, or even more, can understand one another, can know anything of each other’s characters?”

“It is not always length of time that gives clear-sightedness and just judgment,” she said, softly. “Your

own relations misunderstand you sometimes, though they live with you always."

"Then how can one know? Is not life a terrible puzzle?"

"I don't know."

She could not discuss the subject. The calm was gone from their conversation to-day. Under the quivering shade of the pine-trees in the wood, they had looked too closely into each other's hearts; they must go deeper and speak their thoughts simply and truthfully, or else float upward again to the level of ordinary intercourse.

Almost silently they walked back. Colonel St. George asked no questions of Ada. He looked tired and suffering. The afternoon passed drearily by, and all Ada's efforts could not make him cheerful or bring more than a wan smile to his face.

CHAPTER XII.

“ FAITH AND UNFAITH.”

DURING the next few days there were but detached fragments of quiet talk for Kingsley and Ada. Mrs. Bruton had made some new friends, and in her sweetest way she had begged Ada to try and entertain them. One day Kingsley brought some books for Ada and left them at her house, and afterwards they talked together occasionally of them, but Ada found she had always to begin the conversation, and she grew more timid in Kingsley's society; she knew not why. It was easier to talk to Mr. Falkner and Jack Vernon, though she did not care for their society. They were less critical, and were ready to be pleased with any remark she happened to make.

Mrs. Bruton two or three days in the week expected her friends to drop in to lunch, and Kingsley was often of the number. Ada was generally there, and when she was absent Kingsley invariably stayed longer and seemed more talkative. This baffled Kate somewhat, for she gave no inconsiderable attention to these two. Twice Kingsley had asked Ada to take another walk with him, and on both these occasions she had refused. Kingsley attributed her refusal to a deliberate avoidance of him, when truly she was accidentally engaged and could not go. He knew from the quiet suspicious

way he noticed Ada's every action and word, that she had power to interest him beyond most women, but as yet he looked not forward, but let things take their course. Every warm, true impulse which sprang up as he spoke to her, and seemed to read her soul in her faithful eyes, was smothered by a thousand doubts.

So the time went on; no one noticing it much save Colonel St. George, who felt his strength dying out, and his hours of life passing with fearful rapidity. He had no courage to tell Ada—no courage to read sorrow in her young face. He thought that the knowledge would come of itself, and come more gently in that way than from his lips. He did not see that the new emotions life was bringing his child blinded her to all else, and that, in the first flush of love and hope, it was hard for her to see the dark shadow that was creeping over her father.

On one of those reception days of Mrs. Bruton's, when Kingsley came in, Jack Vernon was attempting to play an accompaniment for Ada, and was trying it over as if the notes burnt him. Kingsley came up close to them and stood there a moment looking over the music.

"I think I know this," he said, "allow me to try it."

He swept poor Jack out of the seat, and took his place.

"Will you sing?" he said to Ada.

It was one of the old popular airs of France, full of the mountain breezes, and of the freshness and the simplicity of mountain life. It was the first time Kingsley had heard Ada sing, and he was astonished at the beauty of her voice. It was a contralto, with all the southern fulness and softness; every note was melody, and there was a certain pathetic ring in it

which seemed like the soul speaking. Such voices are rare ; while listening you do not think of the execution or the amount of culture bestowed ; simply the thought in the singer's mind comes to you on a wave of melody, and you receive it silently, wondering at its beauty. By a natural impulse Kingsley took Ada's hand, when she had stopped singing, and held it in his, unmindful of the others who were clapping furiously. Then they all crowded round her and said, "How charming! How pretty!" etc.

Kingsley got up from the piano and stood behind Ada, and bending his head a little, whispered to her, "Do not sing any more if they ask you."

Ada wondered ; but when they pressed her to sing again, she refused, and no entreaty changed her.

"I have been very obedient," she said, as soon as she had an opportunity of speaking to Kingsley ; "but now, why?"

"It was a selfish reason, and perhaps you will be angry. I am afraid to tell you."

"Tell me," she said imperiously, but smiling.

"I did not want the impression left by your song to be spoiled. You might have sung something I did not like."

"But the others might have liked it better?"

"Yes ; and you would perhaps rather please the others than me."

She did not answer, and there was a puzzled look in her face.

"What an impertinent remark," he added, "why should you not like to please the majority? It is, I believe, a woman's *métier*." This with a slight shrug of his shoulders.

“You make me so impatient sometimes,” Ada said, impetuously; “why do you speak in that way? I know you better and like you better than the other people here; of course, I prefer pleasing you.”

“How pleasant it is to hear you speak frankly; there is so little truth in the world.”

“My last speech is an instance of it,” Ada said, laughing. “I do not know you as well as Kate, but I forgot her.”

“Yes, you do. Mrs. Bruton,” he said, lowering his voice, “is untrue at heart; it is impossible for you to know her, though you may think you do.”

“And you?”

“I think *you* will never find me untrue. I am sure of it.” Her eyes fell before the power of his. She dared not look at him.

“Not that it matters to you,” he said, with sudden carelessness, as if trying to shake himself free from some passing emotion, “our paths in life are not likely to cross.”

There was a few minutes' silence, and then Kingsley began, “I do not like any accompaniment to those popular songs; they were never meant to have it. They were composed before music was written on fixed rules, and it is almost impossible to harmonise them. How difficult it is you may judge from the fact that Beethoven wrote an accompaniment to Irish melodies, and it is the worst thing he ever did.”

“You seem to know all about music, and you never told me that you played.”

“I am not a pianist. I can accompany pretty well, and have studied music as a science.”

“I learnt at school, and felt I could never do more

than play like any schoolgirl, so I have given it up now."

"There is no use devoting hours and hours to practice if you have no talent, but you ought to study the principles of music for the sake of your singing."

"I often think of giving that up too."

"Why?"

"Because my singing does not satisfy me."

"You would be very conceited if it did. No one ought to be satisfied with their proficiency in any art, but ought ever to be striving after something higher."

"Yes; but it is not amusing to be on the lowest step of the ladder."

"Nature has placed you a long way up! Cultivation will do the rest. You surely know you have a glorious voice."

"But what is the good of learning to sing to a certain point, and ultimately singing like every other stupid girl?"

"What!" he said, with mock gravity, "you are not satisfied with giving pleasure to your friends?"

"How goody that sounds! Do you really think I could be a *great* singer? Tell me the truth."

"I think you have the voice, but don't know if you have the perseverance."

"I don't think I have," she said resignedly.

"It requires so much to make one great in any branch of art. There should not merely be the development of the special talent, but the simultaneous development of all mental power. You understand me?"

"Yes; quite."

It pleased her to hear Mr. Kingsley talk in this way, and know that he felt she took an interest in something

more than empty chatter. And he? Which of us is indifferent to the fascination of seeing a pretty and intelligent girl interested by our talk, and estimating us as beings of infinitely deeper ken than herself?

"Women are under great disadvantages," he continued, "their education is so frivolous, and then they seem to find it so hard to settle down to anything in right earnest. I suppose it is their nature, everything seems to distract them; everything seems to claim them equally."

"So it does; I remember when I tried to learn at school, if a bee buzzed in at the window, I always had to watch it, and try to trace out its purpose, and see what it would do next. Everything is so interesting;" she added brightly, "the trees, the birds, the sunshine, people's faces, people's lives; all—all—"

"Well, it is the immense power of sympathy that women have, which is their great charm; and yet it is that which mars their power of doing anything very fine. About most women's cleverness there is a sort of dilettante-ism which makes them very fascinating to all clever men. They can throw themselves into *rapport* with so many phases of talent, and quite understand a man's meaning in his work. I have heard an artist say he was never so satisfied as with the criticism of a clever woman. Yet all this expansiveness, this giving of themselves too readily, lessens force. We men are more selfish, and if we have any genius it is likely to be more successful because we direct it in a narrower channel; we give ourselves exclusively to one thing. It is a fact in nature, I think, that everything is intensified by concentration."

"I am sure you are right," Ada said eagerly, "the man's life is best; I am always saying so, and I think you are inclined to agree with me to-day."

"Perhaps so."

"It sounds very pretty to say we are sympathising and ready to understand and be helpful, but I think really it is more weakness than kindness. When one is hard at work at anything which wants a real effort, and some interruption comes, it is ever so much easier to yield to the interruption, flattering oneself that it would not be kind to dismiss it, than to go on working hard."

"I know all about it," she went on in a childish way; "for I do work sometimes, and I think, in my wise moments, that real work and a little play would be much nicer than all play."

"Do you really think so? You look as if your existence should be all sunshine, and as though you should never trouble your head about the problems and difficulties of life."

"Do I look very empty and silly?" she asked in rather an offended tone.

"No Do you want me to tell you what I think of you? Perhaps I shall some day."

His voice had sunk, and his head was bent towards hers.

Ada was held in a happy silence by his words and tone. The strange timidity which would not let her look up at him, would have told them both their secret, but Kate's voice close to Ada roused her from her dreaminess. She felt that she would not for worlds have Kate guess at the feeling of that moment. She tried to free herself from Kingsley's influence.

"If it is very flattering," she answered, with a laugh,

“I should like to hear it this very instant, if not—never!”

Kingsley did not answer, and Ada somehow felt that she had turned aside the words that were on his lips by her flippant speech.

“Do you like flattery, then?” he said, presently.

“Of course! How can you ask the question?”

“Few people will stand a better chance of getting what they wish for. I should think you would receive an unlimited amount all your life, and even the most fulsome compliment bestowed on you will have a grain of truth in it, and that will make it all the sweeter.”

Ada shook her head with an air of melancholy.

“You are quite mistaken, I shall not receive even a limited amount of flattery. Where is it to come from?”

“From the people you meet in the world.”

“My world will be in a very lonely country place.”

“You will go out in London?”

“No; it would bore papa, and perhaps I should tire of it as soon as the novelty wore off.”

“I doubt,” she added provokingly, “if I should have appreciated the very graceful speech you made just now, if I had been listening to the same sort of thing for ever so long!”

“You value things then, in proportion to their newness?”

“I am not sure; I must think about it. If I were to answer hastily, I have a horrible suspicion that you would point out some logical conclusions therefrom which would make me feel silly! You know you are not over polite!”

“Have you no neighbours at Oaklands?” he asked carelessly.

“ Only a few at great distances, and we do not see them very often, I am glad to say.”

“ But you will travel ? ”

“ No. Papa only came here for his health ; he likes to be quiet. We shall not go about much.”

“ And how will you spend your days ? Your years ? ”

“ I shall read a great deal ; study in a vague sort of way—as I told you before—having no one to guide me, and being a woman, shall probably never do anything definite ! I shall take care of my old daddy ; I shall sing, but shall probably spoil my voice for want of instruction ; I shall be very self-willed and have my own way in everything, because there will be no one to oppose me ; and so on to the end of the chapter.”

She laughed as she ended.

“ Shall I tell you the end of the chapter ? ”

“ What ? ” she said quickly.

“ You will treat the squire’s sons in your neighbourhood rather scornfully ; trouble your head not one bit whether they are breaking their hearts about you or not ; find their narrow lives and narrow views rather a bore ; then some day chance will throw in your path some cool calculating man of the world ; he will have brains, though morally good for nothing, the novelty will interest you ; you will marry him, and you will live in your old home, he taking your father’s name.”

He spoke very rapidly, and with an attempt at careless flippancy, watching Ada keenly all the time. She flushed angrily. She did not like the cool way in which he finished her story, nor the position of an indifferent looker-on, which he had taken. Surely after having known her for so long, he might have said something about meeting her again, something trifling but friendly.

She did not know that she had expected such words, till their absence was a pain.

"I don't like that ending at all; it is not pretty, and it won't end like that."

She gave a little impatient stamp with her foot.

"How would you like it to end?" he said, moving so as to face Ada, and thus put himself between her and the other people in the room.

"I do not know. How can I tell?"

"Why not? why not? Do you wish the future to have any link with the present?"

She looked at him in an astonished and impatient way. There was a strange light in his eyes, a strange eagerness in his face, but he had made her cross, she was not in sympathy with his mood now. She felt suddenly awkward, and inclined to break off the conversation.

She looked at her watch.

"How late it is! Papa will expect me."

She moved across the room to Mrs. Bruton.

"Going?" Kate exclaimed, "why I have not said a word to you. Mr. Kingsley has quite monopolised your society. Stay a few minutes."

Ada acquiesced.

"We have been talking of you, my cousin and I?" Kate said, turning towards Mr. Falkner.

For the last quarter of an hour, Falkner had been surveying Miss St. George through his eye glass, dropping it from time to time, and whispering to Kate.

"That little affair seems to be progressing," he said to her, while Ada was talking to Kingsley.

"I am sorry to see Ada making a fool of herself, I must say." Kate answered.

"The sentimental line suits your friend, you must

admit," he said, adjusting his eye-glass, and twisting his moustache.

"I hate sentiment; it is only another word for silliness and selfishness! I like people to enjoy themselves, and be agreeable to every one, and flirt if they like it, but for a pretty girl like Ada St. George to fall in love with a lugubrious individual like Mr. Kingsley, is simply ridiculous!"

"I thought your indignation would be all the other way—at Kingsley falling in love with your friend."

"That, unfortunately, is what he has not done. But why should I care?"

"You seem to have rather a weakness for him yourself. Excuse my cousinly watchfulness!"

"When did you ever know me to fall in love with any one?"

"Can't say that I ever did, but it is not at all flattering to Charlie."

"Oh! Charlie does not count."

"Don't you think Ada very pretty?" she added.

"Yes, rather."

"Why are you not attentive to her? I mean seriously?"

"My dear Kate, as you know my heart is previously engaged!"

"Pooh, Lionel, don't be silly. My friend will be very rich one day."

"By Jove! Why did you not tell me that before?"

"I thought you knew it."

"How was a fellow to know. They don't live in any style."

"It is not too late to improve the shining hour! You are a better-looking man than Mr. Kingsley."

"Yes; I should rather think so, but my modesty obliges me to admit that personal beauty does not always ensure success!"

It was at this moment that Ada moved to go.

"Miss St. George is going," whispered Kate, "let me see if you can induce her to stay a little longer. It will amuse me, I am dull to-day."

This was the way in which they had been talking of Ada, and the result was that Falkner led her to the other end of the room, under pretence of asking her opinion about a sketch, and when there he launched forth in his most amusing vein. Every one except Kingsley came in for a touch of his ridicule, and Ada, without being at all spiteful, found laughter irresistible.

From the other end of the room while he was descanting on India, Kingsley watched Ada closely. He knew to a minute the time she delayed after her expressed determination to go home. At last he bid Mrs. Bruton good-bye and left the house. He strolled past the Bellevue Hotel, turned into the Kursaal gardens, then walked the full length of the Untere Promenade, turning back on his way to his hotel.

It was scarcely intentional Kingsley's choosing this walk, yet he was not surprised on his way back to see Ada coming towards him. She was not alone and this he had not anticipated. Mr. Falkner and Jack Vernon were with her. Ada's face was bright and her step buoyant.

"I say Jack," Falkner was saying, "what a lark it would be to dress up every one we know in accordance with their faces."

"For instance?" Ada said smilingly.

"Jack should be in the skin of a Newfoundland dog.

He looks as if he were perpetually wagging his tail!"

"And this fellow who is coming towards us?" said Jack.

"Oh! I don't know," said Falkner with a quick glance at Ada. "I have not seen him often enough."

Kingsley passed them and took his hat off to Ada. She looked suddenly grave and felt like a child caught at something which it had not thought naughty till it saw the severe face of an elder.

"Why, Miss St. George," said Jack Vernon in an utterly tactless and school-boyish way, "I think that fellow's dreary face has thrown quite a shadow over your's."

"Jack thinks," said Falkner coolly, "that there must be something radically wrong about any one who is not perpetually grinning."

"My dear fellow," he went on, turning to him, "you must remember that we have not all got your contented wag of the tail!"

Any remark of Falkner's, however devoid of wit, was always immensely amusing to Jack, so he laughed.

What a twinge of pain the boy's careless jest had given Ada, and how absurdly grateful she felt to Mr. Falkner for having turned the conversation! Strange light is let in on us sometimes by a few trivial words.

Ada felt troubled as she bid the two men good-bye. Could Kingsley's influence over her be so strong that this lad perceived it? Was she gradually growing to love this man who for her had nothing but friendship, if even that?

She must shake off this influence; it was weak and silly of her to yield to it, for after all she could not really care, after a few short weeks of acquaintanceship.

CHAPTER XIII.

“WILLING TO WOUND.”

It is generally the kind office of some woman friend to spoil the simplicity of a young girl's mind, to make her torture herself by questioning and to throw into her frank, childish manner that shade of embarrassment, and therefore of artificiality which is the first step towards distrust and worldliness. Commend me to a woman like Mrs. Bruton for being of quite priceless worth for that sort of thing !

No particular amusement offering itself one afternoon, Kate indulged herself in a prolonged “chat” with Ada. The depths of silliness and artfulness oftentimes to be found in this feminine game are best known to the players.

As Kate established herself in a comfortable chair, she felt how kind it would be to tell Ada that she was making a fool of herself, and from the height of her own matrimonial experiences to let a little light into Ada's mind on the subject of the wickedness of men in general.

Acting on the solemn warning in Watts' hymn, Kate kept Ada from the wiles of the devil by giving her some work to do. She indulged herself in looking on. The employment that the much harassed evil spirit was

about to give Mrs. Bruton's tongue freed him from the necessity of finding mischief for her fingers.

"There is nothing in the world to do this afternoon," Kate said in a grumbling tone. "Charlie has gone to the gaming tables as usual to waste his money."

"Does he never win?" asked Ada, taking up her work.

"Win! Certainly not in the long run, though he may win a few paltry florins sometimes. He talks of my extravagance, and he has spent enough money on roulette since we came here to buy me dresses for a year! Men are so selfish and so unprincipled."

"That sounds like the sourness of a wizened-up old maid, and not like you, Kate," said Ada, laughing.

"I've grown a great deal wiser since we were at school. I used to laugh at Mamma when she told me these things. She used to say, 'Never let any man think you are devoted to him before or after marriage, they always take advantage of it and try to make a slave of you,' and I see she was quite right."

"I do not believe they are all so intensely mean!"

"You judge by your father, who is a dear old man, and spoils you as much as he can, but some day you'll find out that other men are very different."

Ada began to think that her friend must be very unhappy or else she could never think all these dreadful things.

"Marriage is not all *couleur de rose*, Ada." Kate went on, leaning back in her chair and looking comfortably pathetic. "Men have got their own pleasures and grudge us the most trifling amusements, and if we don't consent to sit in the chimney corner and make perfect old women of ourselves, they think they are most injured individuals!"

"I don't see you sitting in the chimney corner, and I fancy you get your own way pretty well."

"If I do, it is because I have some spirit."

"I am sure Mr. Bruton likes to see you enjoy yourself," Ada said in the kindness of her heart.

"Yes, if it gives him no trouble, if he has not to raise his little finger in the matter." She answered bitterly.

After a moment's silence—she added—

"Of course I would never say these things except to you. I suppose every girl when she is engaged thinks that she and her husband are going to be all and all to one another, and understand every thought and wish that either of them has, and I suppose girls all find out their mistake sooner or later. *Voilà tout.*"

The strongest claim you can make on a woman's confidence is to throw yourself on her sympathy. There is a weakness in the majority of minds which gives them a sensation of meanness if they are dumb about their own thoughts and feelings, when their friends freely open their hearts. The consequence is, that in most cases an affectionate outpouring on the one side is generally followed by a faint trickling of confidences on the other, even from the most reticent.

Ada felt quite sorry for Kate. She remembered how much her friend used to be in love with Charlie before they were married; and the natural conclusion was, that if they were not happy now, it must be Mr. Bruton's fault.

In the pleasant sense of being trusted and treated as a sympathetic friend, Ada lost sight of the utter contemptibleness of exposing the secrets of married life. It is only one by one that the young take in the aspect of certain things.

"Perhaps," said Ada, by way of throwing a little cheerful light on the subject, "men are not really so selfish as you imagine; it may be that they do not bother their heads about trifles which we think a great deal of."

"You poor little innocent! What a delightful victim you will make some day. Why you will not even know that you are being sacrificed."

"Then it will be all right," said Ada, laughing.

"You must be awfully stupid if you do not find it out after a while. One day you will be asked by your lord and master what you want a new dress for; *he* thinks you look very well as you are, and whom else do you want to please? Another time perhaps you will suggest mildly some amusement; you will be told that women always want to gad about; you will be requested to look at him, *he* never goes anywhere for pleasure; and by-and-by the numerous business appointments of your husband will surprise even your unsuspecting mind!"

"What a frightful picture!" said Ada, smiling in the full conviction that her married life would not be the least like that.

"But true," added Kate. "It would not so much matter if—as Lionel says—one was not such an awful fool as to be spooned on one's husband."

"It is hardly fair to abuse men so heartily, when there is not one here to defend them. Women are not angels. There is no one to listen to our confession, so we may as well acknowledge that they are not."

"I'll tell you what girls are, dear."

"What?"

"Donkeys! Charlie would use a stronger word."

"Why?"

“A few of Charlie’s stories would enlighten you on that subject, but I am afraid I cannot do justice to them.”

Somehow Ada felt that she would not like to hear them, and did not press Kate to repeat them.

“One silly thing that girls do, is that they always look so delighted whenever a man speaks to them; and if they like him at all, they show it so plainly that he can’t help laughing at them.”

Ada began to feel uncomfortable, she scarcely knew why, and Kate, no doubt taking a lively interest in her friend, began to watch her carefully.

“But how is a man to find out these things if a girl never shows what she feels?” Ada said timidly.

She felt that the observation was a foolishly young one, and that she had better not give vent to any more like it in Kate’s presence.

Kate laughed.

“There is no danger of their not finding it out if they want to. It is an interesting fact, Ada, that whenever a girl says by her looks, I am ready to be made love to, men never feel inclined to do so, except for their own amusement. Girls spoil all their fun and make laughing stocks of themselves by running after every man who looks sweetly at them. The great thing is to laugh at man’s protestations and enjoy life. If I were to believe half the things men say to me, they would all think they had a right to amuse themselves at my expense. There is not a particle of honour amongst them.”

Kate spoke as if from a large experience, and Ada felt that she was too ignorant to offer an opinion. Probably Kate knew better than she did, nevertheless she did not like her views, and perhaps they were not right

after all. Her general impression was that she would rather not have been told all this.

It occurred to Ada hazily that listening to "protestations" at all was not quite what Kate ought to do, and feeling somehow that this freely expressed opinion about girls was intended for her benefit, Ada found it rather pleasant to prop herself against this possible error of Kate's, and think that the lecturer being wrong herself in one point might also be wrong in all her views.

While Ada was pondering over this, Kate said with a swiftness which was the master stroke of her attack—

"By the way, what is Mr. Kingsley doing to-day?"

The change of subject suggested a link in thought which Ada tried in vain not to recognize. She could not prevent herself blushing.

"I do not know. I have not seen him."

"Perhaps he has gone with that pretty Russian countess; she has a riding party to-day, and Lionel Falkner was telling me that Mr. Kingsley has been trying to get introduced to her for ever so long, and succeeded yesterday."

"Do you mean Comtesse Rutschuk? She is very pretty," said Ada, trying to lead the conversation to this pleasanter channel.

"Do you know why men admire her?" asked Kate.

"For her beauty I should think."

"Not at all. Because she does not care a straw about them; takes all their attentions; is very sweet to them, and would not mind if they were all at the bottom of the sea!"

"And you like that sort of thing?" said Ada, roused at last. "You think that is the right way to act?"

"Perhaps she goes a little too far; but, after all, she enjoys herself, you never hear her laughed at, and every man who knows her is ready to go to the end of the world for her."

"She is not really pretty," Kate added after a moment's silence.

"I think she is," Ada said decidedly.

She felt inclined to contradict Kate and assert herself. She was weary of this depreciatory talk.

"You can't really think so, dear. She is terribly made up. I am sure she dyes her hair, and am quite certain she paints her eyebrows, for I was standing quite close to her the other day and saw the dark line on her skin underneath; besides you never see those dark eyebrows with hair so golden as hers is. Falkner is the only man who does not rave about her. He says you are much better looking, and I quite agree with him."

"Did he ask you to tell me so?" Ada said sharply; she was getting more and more irritated.

"Oh! no; if he had I'd have left him to say it himself; I dare say you would have liked it much better."

"Perhaps so," Ada answered with a laugh.

She was glad to turn the interest to Falkner, and more glad when she found a pretext for leaving. Her simple enjoyment of everything seemed spoiled from this hour's talk, and yet it was absurd to mind Kate's remarks.


After she had left Mrs. Bruton, Ada was vacillating between opposite states of feeling. One moment she decided that Kate took quite a wrong view of things, and she was sure her remarks were not worth thinking about. The next moment Ada felt a horrible dread lest she had seemed to enjoy Mr. Kingsley's society overmuch, and

that Charlie had heard some one make some remark about her. She felt hot and cold, angry, ready to cry, and went through every stage of girlish misery. Finally she arrived at the conclusion that as she was not at all in love with Mr. Kingsley, only liked him very much, [beautiful feminine distinction which woman's mind thoroughly appreciates!] it was quite impossible she could have led him to misunderstand her, and therefore, she would continue to be friendly and to enjoy herself, and it would be utterly silly to make any difference. Of course after these reflections Ada was quite comfortable, though certain new phases of feeling would insist on cropping up and worrying her now and then.

When Ada had gone, Mrs. Bruton was conscious of a delightful sensation of having been very kind to her.

"Poor girl," she thought, "she is an awful little fool. She is just the sort of woman, as Charlie says, that men delight in deceiving, with those soft eyes of hers and that sentimental expression."

Mrs. Bruton came to the conclusion that it was lucky for Ada that she had come to Homburg. Ada was not a bad sort of girl, but she was quite silly. Kate trusted that the hints she had given would not be without effect. Really a girl of spirit would never allow Kingsley to monopolise her like that; any one could see that the man was not serious. For her part, Kate reflected, she could not see the attraction of this Adonis. He was not handsome and had decidedly bad manners. It was only a few days ago that she had been talking to him for full five minutes, and he had not paid the slightest attention to what she was saying, and had given most idiotic answers.



Kate's eyes flashed a little as she thought of it. No man had ever shown himself so indifferent to her before and she was inclined to punish him. He was not worth a thought of course except for Ada's sake, but as she had introduced him and made a fuss about him, it would be a good thing to give him a lesson, and open Ada's eyes a little.

It was getting rather slow at Homburg. Lionel was becoming tiresome. It was so stupid of men not to understand that a flirtation up to a certain point is very good fun but not beyond it. Their abominable conceit is always making them dissatisfied till they can wind you round their little finger; but Kate reflected, with justice, it would be hard for any man to make a slave of her. (It might be a subject for speculation, how many women no higher motive than intense selfishness saves from compromising themselves.)

It might be much livelier, Kate went on to think, if Ada was reasonable and would amuse herself and others. Kate felt herself to have a most straightforward and candid nature, and what she could not bear in Ada was that way she had of keeping everything to herself, instead of confiding in her friend and having a good chat and laugh over everything.

Well, if Ada chose to be reserved, it was her own fault if she suffered for it. It was not natural for a girl to be reticent and sly, and it certainly was not a good trait in her character.

Mrs. Bruton would probably have arrived at several more conclusions, satisfactory to herself and condemnatory of her friend if her thoughts had not been interrupted at this point by Kingsley coming in.

"Come to look for Ada evidently," she said to herself

and a malicious desire seized her to make him enjoy this visit immensely !

" Ah," she said aloud " I am very glad to see you, I am so dull. Charlie has taken himself off, as all good husbands should, Ada St. George has just gone, and I have no one to talk to."

Kingsley felt inclined to ask what had become of the usual train of followers.

" You know," he said sitting down beside her, " you will feel ever so much better if you make some exertion, suppose you entertain me ! It is most bracing to do something for the sake of others."

" It would be such a new sensation ; I don't think I'll risk it.

" I hope," Kate added, " you enjoyed your ride with the Comtesse ?"

She leaned back in her chair and looked at him coolly and provokingly. He was not bad looking after all, but she hated a man whose face did not light up when he spoke to her. If he did not show any pleasure in her society, she was certainly not going to be bored because he wanted to see Ada ! " Why did he not go and look for her at her own house ? Afraid of the Colonel, perhaps !"

" How did you know I went out with the Comtesse Rutschuk ?" asked Kingsley, faintly flattered and amused.

" I know most things," she answered significantly.

" Perhaps you do not know how flattering it is to me that you should interest yourself in my doings ?"

" I interest myself in the Comtesse. I look upon every beautiful woman as my mortal foe !"

She was twisting her rings round and round on her white fingers, and spoke in such a jesting way that her frankness was quite fascinating.

“Then you honestly think her beautiful?” Kingsley asked, watching Kate’s hands and thinking of the great difference of expression between her hands and Ada’s.

“Of course I do,” Kate answered, “Her hair has such a pretty bright tint, and her eyebrows are so exquisitely marked, and altogether she is a very *distingue* looking woman. I always admire pretty women.”

“You can afford to do so.”

“Which means that I am not ugly myself? Thank you.”

For a very young woman Kate Bruton took a compliment in a wonderfully cool way. Men invariably felt inclined to try again, to see if the next would make any deeper impression or be more worthy her notice.

“Perhaps it means much more.”

“I like those vague sort of compliments, which one can interpret in the most flattering way,—but to return to the Comtesse; imagine Lionel Falkner’s stupidity, he does not admire her, he thinks Ada St. George much prettier!”

If Kate expected to extract Kingsley’s opinion she was disappointed.

“Don’t you?” he said quietly.

“I’ve known Ada so long I can’t judge. I think Ada wants manner, and that want spoils her, but she is very young.”

“You knew Miss St. George in England, did you not?” Kate added.

Of course she was perfectly aware that he had never seen Ada before he came to Homburg.

Kingsley looked at her for a minute.

“No,” he said lazily, “I had not that honour.”

“I do not know what put it into my head that you had

met before. I suppose because you seem such friends, but she has that nice, bright, friendly way with every one. Ada is running away with the affections of all my friends ! Lionel Falkner is quite distracted about her, and even my husband breaks in upon my domestic felicity by constant remarks about "how awfully pretty that girl Ada is."

"You seem to bear it pretty well."

"Yes, I like to see a girl flirt and amuse herself. What is the good of wasting your youth? Why not enjoy yourself while you can? It is so stupid to marry and settle down too young."

"I should think a great many men thought so in your case; too soon placed beyond their reach," Kingsley said easily.

He knew he need not be too particular as to the quality of the compliment. He had already learnt that Mrs. Bruton had such a wonderful power of absorption that the stream of flattery need not be too thin.

"Do not expect me to contradict you," she answered, laughing; "they might have thought so if I had gone out much before I was married, but I was married straight from school."

"Has Ada," she added, "given you an account of our school-days and of our expedition to the fortune-teller?"

Kingsley was not thrown off his guard, and did not care about retailing Ada's conversation with him.

"No," he answered; "your friend has not honoured me so far."

"Well, you must ask her to tell you all about it. She has such a naïve way of relating things about herself. Sometimes, if I did not know Ada so well I should

almost think there was a little affectation in her simple manner."

"I think Miss St George is perfectly unaffected."

This was the first word that Kingsley had said in Ada's praise, and Kate objected to it, and thought what a fool Kingsley was, and how easily even men of the world are taken in; but these thoughts only made her say with the greater enthusiasm,

"Perfectly. She is quite simple, she enjoys everything, and takes everything as it comes with the light-heartedness and thoughtlessness of a child."

After a moment's pause Kate added,

"It is sad to see Colonel St. George failing so fast. Did you ever notice how the old man watches Ada as if he could not let her out of his sight and had not courage to spoil her pleasure?"

This was true, and Kingsley had noticed it himself. Mrs. Bruton's allusion to it made Kingsley somehow think better of her.

It is impossible to calculate the effect of trivial things on a man's estimate of a woman. He may be quite sceptical of a woman's sincerity for an hour, and yet swallow the grossest piece of hypocrisy from her lips at the end of it.

A whole chain of quite trifling incidents oftentimes link themselves together and bear out a hurtful idea with a sort of spiteful triumph.

Ada had left her parasol at Mrs. Bruton's and came back for it. On her way she met Mr. Falkner, and he accompanied her to Kate's, so that at the end of Kingsley's visit they came in together. For their separate reasons—completely understood and rejoiced in by Mrs. Bruton—Kingsley and Ada were a little less cordial than usual in their greeting.

The position of the two chief actors appeared to each other to be this,—Kingsley was sitting with Mrs. Bruton, whom he openly said he disliked, and Ada found in their manner, even in the general air of the room, a look of comfortable enjoyment.

Ada was in the company of a man whom Kingsley in his own mind termed “an impertinent hound,” and whom she could easily have avoided walking with if she chose.

The result of their position and their reflections, was that Ada, having got her parasol, accepted, with a smile of apparent pleasure, Falkner’s escort back to the Untere Promenade, and Kingsley having opened the door for her, returned to his seat beside Mrs. Bruton.

From this day there was a distinct change in Ada and Kingsley. If they had been obliged to account for it in words they would have found it impossible. Ada tried hard to grasp it and realise what it meant, but it evaded her, as a cloud of smoke which though it is lost on the instant has poisoned the air.

CHAPTER XIV.

“WHAT MAY THIS MEAN?”

“MONSIEUR le Lugubre is improving,” said Falkner to Mrs. Bruton, one day in the Kursaal gardens. He was looking at Kingsley, who was talking to Ada in an animated way unusual for him.

“Yes. Gare à vous! I think in spite of your endeavours you have not made much impression, have you?”

“Did you ever hear me boast of my conquests? Kingsley,” he added with much complacency, “has come out in quite a new light, and you may draw your own conclusions from that.”

It is true that Kingsley's manner towards Ada had altered since that day he had met her walking with Falkner and Vernon. When he talked to her now, he always led the conversation up to something personal and complimentary to Ada. He became openly devoted to her. His eyes expressed freely his admiration. Instead of discussing gravely, as he used to do, their thoughts and tastes, he seemed to find everything that Ada did was good. Sometimes a lingering pressure of the hand, or a compliment whispered to her as they parted, would surprise her, and she would look at him with an astonished expression. She would

have understood it from Falkner and have estimated it at its true worth, but it was unlike Kingsley. Was it that he did not care, had perceived that she was not quite indifferent, and was taking advantage of that and amusing himself? That thought was horrible; it took possession of her and seemed to gnaw her ceaselessly, and destroy all her pleasure. She became excited in her manner; more ready to join in the empty flippant talk that circulated at Mrs. Bruton's. She encouraged Falkner, Vernon, any one she met to talk and laugh with her. She received Kingsley's attention airily and jestingly, finding with great readiness sharp, mocking things to say. There were moments—when Kingsley seemed to grow earnest and serious and his eyes softened—that a flippant remark died away on her lips and her face grew troubled. And so with changing moods and a strange feeling of unrest, the days went by.

As yet Ada had not noticed how ill her father was. He had had a man of business with him lately, and of course there was no use in Ada's staying with him when the lawyer was there. Then when she came home and he looked tired, it was easy to account for it—he had wearied himself with business. Colonel St. George had not been out for some days now, but he was always uncomplaining and urged Ada to go with her friend. Once or twice she had stayed at home all day with her father, but she had been *distracte*; little comfort to him and far less to herself.

The Homburg season was drawing to a close: Mrs. Bruton talked of leaving; every one talked of leaving. They seemed to have extracted every drop of excitement and enjoyment from the place, and to be leaving it dusty, worn out, and flat. It would wake up again next year

into a flashy brightness ; now, it was falling into the ugly sleep of a worthless, dissipated life.

Oaklands seemed a faint memory to Ada, and thinking of it now, she could form no idea of her life there when she returned. Her mind was confused ; there was no calm thought, from the shelter of which she could look out with steadiness on the whirling mass of ideas which rushed over her. Poor child ! she had suddenly woke from the quietude of an innocent childhood to find everything a puzzle, and to see in herself and others complicated forms of feeling which she could not understand—could not trace to a simple cause.

Mrs. Bruton was to give an evening party. Ada was invited ; Kingsley was invited ; everyone was invited, acquaintances Mrs. Bruton had made on her first arrival, others she had picked up only the day before. Kingsley meant to go. A few days more and he would leave Homburg, so he told himself ; he was sick of the place. Meanwhile, he would amuse himself. By Jove ! he admired that Mrs. Bruton ; so frankly, worldly, no pretence about it, but a sharp, agreeable woman with whom a man could pass an hour or two very pleasantly. Very practical and sensible in her own way too ; liked admiration and devotion, but where was the woman that did not, he would like to know ? Miss St. George would be there. He had made a mistake about *her*. Good Lord, what a fool he had been ! He had fancied her one of those rare, sensitive, noble natures ; full of thought and reserve, caring nothing for men's empty flatteries, and he had treated her in a straightforward way, worthy of this nature. Well, he was getting undeceived. Nothing like a little time and observation to make out the character of a woman. She was a very charming young girl, no

doubt ; but not different from others ; as easy to amuse himself with ; as easy to flirt with.

All through this day—this of Mrs. Bruton's soiree—Ada kept imagining how the evening would be passed. She held long conversations with Kingsley in fancy, and they said many things which were certainly never spoken. Much greater trouble than usual was expended on her toilette, and greater dissatisfaction experienced at the results. Love, in blinding us to the defects of the beloved, makes us strangely clear-sighted as to our own. Ada was sure she should feel uncomfortable and extinguished by Mrs. Bruton. She was beginning to observe that Kate was a woman whose presence could never be overlooked, and that there was a certain self-assertion about her which seemed to exercise a great influence.

Ada went early as she was alone. When she came into the drawing-room, Kate was arranging some flowers, and her husband was sitting down, watching her in a lazy sort of way. She turned and kissed Ada without ceasing her occupation.

“How nice you look, dear,” she said, in what seemed to Ada a patronising tone.

Ada observed that she had scarcely glanced at her as she spoke. How well she looked, with her fair roundness of outline and brilliant hair! Yet Ada found herself asserting mentally that Kate was not pretty. It was a face that made one angry by looking so well because there seemed no reality in its beauty. She was growing hard in her thoughts about Kate. Was it possible that, hidden away somewhere, there was some petty jealousy which bore this fruit? She had never comprehended that womanish weakness ; she had also thought that she could not alter in friendship. Why

was she changing to Kate? Her friend seemed just as kind to her; always asking her to her house; always affectionate in her manner; and yet Ada certainly did not like her so well. She felt annoyed with herself and determined to continue the same, so in her efforts to rake up the embers of her friendship, it threw out some momentary sparks which had no true heat in them, and which did not really deceive herself or any one else.

"How very pretty your dress is, Kate!"

This was one of the sparks.

"I am glad you think so. I think it is rather dowdy, fit for my grandmother."

"You look young enough in it, goodness knows," growled her husband from his seat near the window.

"I invited your friend Kingsley, Ada," she said, taking no notice of his little speech.

At this Ada foolishly blushed.

"I did not really want to ask him, you know," she continued.

"Then I think it's a pity you did," Ada said sharply.

"I thought you would scold, if I did not. Don't look so cross. Really, Ada, I have come to the conclusion that I do not like your friend."

With difficulty, Ada prevented herself from saying, "No one asked you to."

"I think you are a little wee bit blinded, Ada, but if you could get rid of that mental darkness——"

Here she broke off and said in a lower tone "You need not look so indignantly in Charlie's direction, I assure you he is not paying the slightest attention to us." How hateful to be driven into a corner, so as to find an answer impossible. Of course Ada thought it very bad taste of Kate to discuss this before her husband,

but she could not say so; it would seem to give the subject an importance which she did not wish it to have. When one is angry, nervous, and eager, the right word never comes in the right place.

“I was not thinking of him. I am sure our conversation is not so important that it should be conducted in secrecy!”

This was said with such an increase of colour, that it gave the lie to her words.

“You must know, Ada, I think Mr. Kingsley is a regular flirt. He has that easy sort of familiar manner which is utterly worldly. He is always gentlemanly, but seems to me to be gleaning all he can, and not caring about any one.”

“I think he is quite right,” she answered, laughing uncomfortably.

Ada was at that age when a girl is dreadfully sensitive, and mere trifles seem to spoil her life. The whole pleasure of the evening seemed destroyed by those words.

Just then the door opened, and Kingsley was announced.

“Ah,” said Kate with that ease of manner which never forsook her, “we were just talking of you.”

“Praising me of course,” he said with a laugh.”

“Ah! Bruton,” he added, “I did not see you at first. Perhaps you will tell me some of the flattering things that have been said?”

Charlie laughed in his usual heavy way. Kate was still toying with the flowers.

“Your arrangement of course,” Kingsley said, “I have only to look at your costume to see the same taste. Compliments on dress should always be in French. ‘Votre mise est adorable.’”

How ridiculous all this sounded to Ada ! They moved across the room to look at some decoration that Kate's skilful fingers had made, and began talking in a low tone, while Mr. Bruton came over to Ada and kept up a counter-flow of heavy talk.

The guests came at last, and the relative position of the people in the room was changed. A Russian Count, with a furious moustache, engrossed the attention of Kate, and Kingsley walked directly over to Ada.

"What a very fascinating woman your friend is," he said, sitting down close to her in a deliberate sort of way, as if he had quite a right to monopolise her society. This irritated Ada horribly, though five minutes previously she had longed for him to come and speak to her.

"You have changed your opinion of her," she said quickly.

"Oh ! yes, one may be permitted to do so. You will find that people are often mistaken at first."

There was silence for a few minutes. Ada felt rather than saw that he was studying her dress, and under this inspection she grew uncomfortable.

"Don't forget," she said, laughing in a mocking way, "that I was a listener to your compliments on Mrs. Bruton's dress ; do not say quite the same things this time, it would be tame."

It was quite a silly speech, and Ada thought that Mr. Kingsley looked astonished.

"I was not thinking of making a remark on your dress, but since you invite me to do so, I will say that you look charming."

This was said in a tone of exaggerated politeness, and to Ada's ears sounded very satirical. One of Mrs.

Bruton's numerous friends came up to speak to Ada, and she launched into conversation with him in an excited way. Kingsley did not move from his seat, and the consciousness that he was watching her made her talk and laugh more than she felt inclined to do. Presently this man was summoned away to assert in languishing manner and tuneless voice, "She is not here. She is not here." As soon as he was fairly launched in his song, Kingsley said, "Will you come out on the verandah, Miss St. George?"

"Are we not very well here?" she said, "we can hear the music better."

"As you like."

Moved by some perversity, which lingers in the heart of every woman, she got up quietly and walked out on the verandah, followed by Kingsley.

There were big oleander trees on the balcony, and two or three chairs. It was a mild summer's night, the air so warm that it seemed to enwrap her softly. The night was clear without being starlit. Kingsley placed two chairs at one end of the balcony; Ada's next the oleander tree, so that when she sat down the boughs were about her head.

"There," he said, "I like you so, with the blossoms in your hair. I am going away in a few days," he added.

Here he paused as if to note the effect of his words.

"Really," she said carelessly; "well, your stay has been much longer than you intended at first."

"Yes. Do you pretend to be ignorant of the cause?"

He leant his arm on the railings and so looked in her face. His tone, his manner was simply that of a man who was amusing himself, Ada thought, and yet when

she looked up at him for a second, there seemed such an expression of earnestness in his eyes that she did not know what to believe.

"I do not know," she said slowly, "I am too lazy to guess." He did not speak for some time, the singing had ceased, and there was a buzz of talking. Every moment Ada expected Kate to come out, and she knew how awkward she should feel.

"Shall I be quite forgotten?" he said at last in a low tone.

She did not know what to say. She did not understand him. What did it all mean? She could not let the silence last, so she said in an uneasy way,

"Do you want me to make a polite speech and say, I shall be very sorry to lose your society?"

"No, I should like you to say something very different and in a very different tone."

The singing had recommenced, and Ada availing herself of it said—

"If we do not talk, we shall hear this song."

"Do not listen to that howling of false sentiment; listen to me. We shall probably never meet again, and I love you, Ada."

As he spoke Ada felt his arm round her. For half a second she let it rest there. The words of love, heard for the first time, are very sweet to a young girl's ears, but there came a sudden conviction to her that he was not sincere. It never occurred to her that Mr. Kingsley ought to have proposed to her in due form before speaking thus; she was too utterly unconventional and free from calculation to think about that; simply his words did not ring true, and her keen sensitiveness and quick perception saved her from accepting his love and

acknowledging her own feelings. She turned round, drawing herself away from his arm with a certain dignity of movement which was quite free from exaggeration.

“Mr. Kingsley,” she said, “I am very young, and you are the first man that has ever spoken to me like this. If you really loved me, and I really loved you, I suppose it would be natural that you should speak in this way, and that I should like it, but it is not the case.”

Her lips felt parched ; it seemed hard to move them, the words seemed to cling to them, and come forth too slowly. Gaining courage after a minute, she went on more rapidly,—

“I suppose it amuses you, but I think it contemptible to play at love. To a man of the world like you, I suppose what I say sounds like a silly little girl’s nonsense, but I think it very serious to care for any one *really*, and the affectation of it is an impertinence.”

Unconsciously her hand resting on the railing, tightened in its grasp. Was she casting away his love ? Was she too critical ? She kept her self-possession through the silence that followed, though her heart beat strangely and the tears came to her eyes. At last Kingsley spoke, and it was quite gravely and softly.

“Miss St. George—from my very heart, I ask your forgiveness. You have used the right word when you called my conduct—impertinence, but I think it is the last time you will ever have to use it. I have been trying to flirt with you for the last week, but it has been all a sham.”

Ada turned towards him with great astonishment in her face.

“You don’t understand me ; I mean that I began to

think you a flirt, and determined to meet you with your own weapons. I saw you talking and laughing with those empty headed fellows that hang about Mrs. Bruton, and began to think you as frivolous as the rest."

"It amuses me to talk to people; I see no reason for your unjust conclusions," she said quietly.

"No, I can scarcely expect it, but it is natural enough for men to judge in this way. If girls only knew the things men say of them, they would be more careful."

"I do not think that ought to influence them in the least. Girls ought to be perfectly frank and simple in their manners, and not biassed by any one's opinion. If they are misunderstood they can't help it; I suppose that depends a good deal on the minds of those that judge them."

"Which means, that it is my own inferiority that made me take a wrong view of you? I deserve the reproof, but, Ada, will you shake hands with me, and say you forgive me? I am really, really sorry."

He held out his hand as he spoke. There was truth in his voice, in his eyes. Ada put her hand in his. There were tears in her eyes as they made up their quarrel.

"Why did you misjudge me?" she said gently.

"You are only a child; you cannot understand, you cannot know how the world looks to me. To expect me to take the same view of life as you do, would be as absurd as to insist that when you see the sun rising here, it must be rising at the Antipodes."

"Are we so entirely opposed in thought and feeling?" she said timidly.

"I do not know. Perhaps not so much as I imagined." He hesitated, and looked into her eyes, in

the dim light, with a long searching gaze. There was something pleading in his expression, something which made her turn towards him with a strange fear and joy in her heart. He drew his breath quickly and pushed his hair off his brow with an impatient, weary movement.

“ Shall we go back now ? ” he said.

He rose as he spoke and they stepped into the bright room, back amongst the laughing, chattering crowd. Ada felt the glare of light unpleasantly as she entered, and in her nervousness it seemed as though every one looked at her.

CHAPTER XV.

“LET ME THINK OF HER AS THEN.”

It was late when Ada got home that night, but her father was awake and called to her as she passed.

“Why are you not asleep?” she said.

“I don’t know, dear. How did you enjoy your party?”

“Very well.”

She blushed, but the room was dark, so it did not matter. She bid her father good night, and went to bed. For a long time she lay awake, and tossed from side to side in the restlessness of excitement. She thought over her conversation with Mr. Kingsley, and found now that there were many things she might have said; she thought of their meeting on the morrow and grew impatient for it. There were a thousand things might prevent her seeing him; a wet day for instance. Then she was impelled to jump up and look out of the window. A dull heavy-looking dawn, with black clouds coming up on the horizon. She went back to bed and began to wish for sleep. She felt puzzled about everything, and it worried her; and, after all, what was the good of thinking? Sleep came at last, and when she woke she found that the rain had come in good earnest, and was dashing against the windows cruelly.

Now for an account of the party, thought Ada as she went into breakfast.

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at a ball since the dance your regiment gave when I was a wee child."

"Do you remember it? That was at Allahabad, and you could not have been more than six years old."

"It was a great event to me, so, of course, I recollect it; why, I even remember the blue sash I wore, and how proud I was of it."

"How pretty your mother looked that night! She had a great longing to dance, and she tried to valse with Major —, Major —, I forget the fellow's name, but she nearly fainted."

Colonel St. George was carried along by his thoughts. Every event of that night was vividly before him, and his eyes glistened and his face grew young with the glow of old memories. To Ada, impatient and watchful for each new event that time might bring, it seemed strange that any one should live on memory.

The day was depressing to Ada. It rained steadily. Each little bit of blue sky that raised hopes of going out was quickly clouded over. She read the *Times* aloud to her father; she talked about Oaklands, but it did not interest her; the old home life seemed vague and distant. At last an idea occurred to Ada that she would trim up one of her dresses, and make it suitable for THE BALL. It was in big capitals in her mind; after all she was only a child. There is no doubt about it that dress is a consolation to most women; when they are worried about anything they straightway begin to design something pretty to array themselves in. Wherefore, Ada busied herself with some white fabric and strewed the floor of their little sitting-room with scraps, and made it generally untidy; not without a secret feeling that just because the room was not presentable some one would call. When

"Oh! Fairy," Colonel St. George said as she came in. "I did not expect to see you till mid-day at least!"

"It was not a ball, daddy; there was nothing to tire me."

"Well, who was there?"

Ada sat down and began to pour out the mild liquid that in Germany is called tea. They preferred the ghost of their English drink to any German reality! Ada answered leisurely:

"There were two or three officers, friends of Mr. Bruton's; Mr. Kingsley, a Russian Count with fierce moustaches, a pretty girl, a cousin of Mr. Vernon's, and two or three others, who came I know not whence."

"What did you do? How did you spend the evening?"

"There was a mild attempt at music. One of these officers sang. He sang so badly he was requested to continue, and this he very obligingly did!"

"Then, altogether," her father said, laughing, "you found it rather dull."

Poor old man! he forgot that the enjoyment of a party does not always depend on the beauty of the music!

"Oh! no, I liked it very well."

"Had you any one to talk to?"

"Yes. I think I spoke to every one. I was introduced to several. I don't know what they all said. Mr. Bruton talked about hunting, and I found it very difficult to keep up a conversation with him."

"Poor child! you have not much amusement here. By the way, I was thinking you might go to the Kursaal ball some night if you can get your friend to take you."

"How nice!" she said eagerly. "I have never been

at a ball since the dance your regiment gave when I was a wee child."

"Do you remember it? That was at Allahabad, and you could not have been more than six years old."

"It was a great event to me, so, of course, I recollect it; why, I even remember the blue sash I wore, and how proud I was of it."

"How pretty your mother looked that night! She had a great longing to dance, and she tried to valse with Major —, Major —, I forget the fellow's name, but she nearly fainted."

Colonel St. George was carried along by his thoughts. Every event of that night was vividly before him, and his eyes glistened and his face grew young with the glow of old memories. To Ada, impatient and watchful for each new event that time might bring, it seemed strange that any one should live on memory.

The day was depressing to Ada. It rained steadily. Each little bit of blue sky that raised hopes of going out was quickly clouded over. She read the *Times* aloud to her father; she talked about Oaklands, but it did not interest her; the old home life seemed vague and distant. At last an idea occurred to Ada that she would trim up one of her dresses, and make it suitable for THE BALL. It was in big capitals in her mind; after all she was only a child. There is no doubt about it that dress is a consolation to most women; when they are worried about anything they straightway begin to design something pretty to array themselves in. Wherefore, Ada busied herself with some white fabric and strewed the floor of their little sitting-room with scraps, and made it generally untidy; not without a secret feeling that just because the room was not presentable some one would call. When

in the agonies of making a thing which I believe is called a *ruche*—something fluffy and impossible-looking to male eyes—there came a step in the passage, and in due time a knock at the door. No warning ring, no time for a decampment, Ada seized all her work with the instinct of despair, and Kingsley walked in as she was doing so. She laughed and so did Kingsley; Colonel St. George joined, and after that it was impossible to be very stiff.

“I came to ask how Miss St. George is after her party. There was no hope of seeing you in the gardens on such a fearful day.”

“No, we did not think of going out.”

A rash assertion, for Ada had many times come to the conclusion that it was not at all a bad day, and that under the trees no one could feel the rain.

“You meditate more gaiety, to judge by your work.”

“Yes. Papa says I may go to the next *Kursaal* ball. I want to see what it is like.”

“Very dull, I should fancy. Your friend, Mrs. Bruton, goes often, I believe.”

“Yes; but I never thought of going before.”

“You will be dreadfully bored, I should think.”

“You have been suffering,” Kingsley said, turning to Colonel St. George, “and this is not a pleasant place for an invalid.”

“No; and these marvellous waters have not done much good in my case.”

“They say that the good effect is felt sometime after,” said Ada, quoting her favourite authority hopefully. Her father smiled sadly. How was it Ada could only see the bright side of everything; even this stranger understood better.

"You have stayed the allotted time," said Kingsley. "I suppose you will leave Homburg soon?"

"Yes, if I am well enough to travel."

He said it a little stiffly. Why should this man inquire into his plans?

"It is not idle curiosity that makes me ask," Kingsley said quickly. "I do not know how to put what I mean without seeming officious."

He stopped.

"What is meant politely, I trust I shall not misconstrue."

"If I can be of any use to you," he said hesitatingly, "I would gladly travel with you."

Having said so much he went on more rapidly:

"I am quite free, I can travel by any route, I shall be leaving Homburg myself. In fact, it would be a real pleasure to an idle fellow like me to feel that I was of any use."

"You are very kind," Colonel St. George said, casting a quick glance at Ada, whose whole face expressed her pleasure and gladness.

They would travel together; he would help to take care of her father, who would of course see how nice Mr. Kingsley really was. Ada's heart gave a bright bound at the thought, like the spring of a happy child, for very gladness.

"I am much obliged to you," Colonel St. George continued.

"We are both thankful, Fairy and I, but I have written to my brother to come to me."

Ada's face fell.

"It is true I am not strong and the responsibility of an invalid is too much for my child alone. Of course my brother knows my ways."

"I am sure he does not," burst in Ada.

"And," added her father, taking no notice of her interruption, "I should not feel myself justified in giving any trouble to a stranger."

Half angry with himself for repelling kindness, and yet reading indignantly in Ada's face the motive of this offer—the old man's tone wavered while he was speaking, and at last distrust of Kingsley prevailed and the last word was said with cold emphasis. Kingsley understood it all; understood too the confused distressed look on Ada's face. He was in one of his best moods to-day, not distrustful, but sensitively mindful of others.

"I know it must seem rather presuming of me to propose such a thing," he said, "but I have seen much of Miss St. George during the last six weeks; have seen her every day I think."

He looked brightly at Ada in confirmation of his statement.

"So I cannot feel a stranger to you; will you excuse me?"

"Willingly," said Colonel St. George. "I am indebted to you."

"You are leaving Homburg yourself?" he asked, waiving the subject which he thought this young man was clinging to for an unnecessarily long time.

"I do not know. Lately I scarcely decide from day to day what I shall do. For some reasons this is not by any means a pleasant place to me."

"You are here perhaps by medical advice?"

Colonel St. George spoke with the faint interest of one who suffered himself.

"No, no," Kingsley replied, laughing, "I don't look a subject for doctors, I fancy. I have little personal experience of illness."

There was no word spoken for a minute. Ada felt angry and awkward. This visit of Kingsley's had not been a success.

"No," he said, after a minute, continuing the subject ; "I came to look after a youngster who was ruining himself here at the gaming tables. He had got into bad hands, and was the dupe of a lot of designing scoundrels. I thought if I showed them up, he might see what a fool he was making of himself."

"You succeeded, I trust."

"To a certain extent, but he is a weak-headed lad, and he will never do much good—'Faiblesse vaut vice.'"

Up to this point Kingsley had talked exclusively to Colonel St. George, he now turned to Ada.

"It was the third day after I came to Homburg that I met you. Do you remember how silent we were during dinner? Never articulated till the very end. That was thoroughly English, was it not?"

There was no desire on Kingsley's part to hide how intimate he was with Ada. The old man's suspicions seemed absurd and worried him rather; he had no wish to woo his daughter in a sneaky way as if he were ashamed of it; no doubt Colonel St. George was accustomed to meet with those kind of fellows, young fools who did not know their own minds, and who amused themselves at the expense of every girl they came across, but he was somewhat different, thank God, and Colonel St. George might find that out as soon as he liked.

"Did you expect me to begin the conversation?" said Ada laughingly.

"No, but I was lazy or shy, I do not know which."

"Have you been singing much?" he added, looking at the open piano.

Somehow the conversation did not go on in any steady channel, but burst out here and there in an erratic and unsatisfactory manner, showing that the speakers were not much at their ease.

"No, I cannot accompany myself well, and papa is a severe critic."

"No, no, Fairy," said her father, "but I do not like a jumble on the piano to accompany a good voice."

"Your daughter has a splendid voice," said Kingsley enthusiastically, "allow me to play for her to-day, and you shall hear her to advantage."

He got up as he spoke and went to the piano.

"I'll sing one of papa's favourites," she said, joining him and turning the music over to find it.

Colonel St. George said nothing, he listened silently.

"It is very different with your accompaniment," he said when it was ended, "but the truth is I cannot enjoy music as I used to; my head is so weak."

He put his hand to his brow wearily.

"I should think," said Kingsley quickly, rising as he spoke, "that visitors worry you horribly. It was very inconsiderate of me to stay."

His manner was so frank and courteous, his grasp of the hand so strong and true, that Colonel St. George was disarmed and said something about seeing him again.

"I should like to come and see you often, sir," he said, "but I know it is an exertion for a man to talk, when he is ill, to people he does not know well, and I cannot expect you to make a friend of me at once. Good-bye."

Colonel St. George returned his hand-shake with warmth, it was irresistible. Kingsley went away, looking up at the window as he passed and nodding to Ada. How doubly attractive she was to him there with her father,

away from the glare and rattle of fashionable fools. It seemed her true place; there, in her house, there was a quiet softness in her eyes, a happiness in her face, which he had never seen while she was in what is called society. He had been perhaps severely critical and unjust to her hitherto. After all, every one is subject to phases of feeling and manner; in some we are quite true to ourselves, simple in our thoughts and actions; in others, there is necessarily a surface of unreality, which is unavoidable, which does not change us in the least, and is merely assumed for self-protection. He had been confounding these two sides of Ada's character, but with the remembrance of the last half-hour strong in his heart, he thought he could never mistake her again.

The little quiet room, to which, ugly as it was, Ada had given an air of grace and prettiness; the old-fashioned blue jar, full of yellow lilies arranged by her; the little table near her father's chair, so placed that he could readily reach everything; the books that lay about, not yellow-backed novels, but books of worth and beauty; he had noted all. Even the disorder caused by Ada's work had a charm for him; it was her dress, to be worn by her, and his imagination clothed her in its soft white folds, and found her beautiful.

Meanwhile, Ada had been looking out of the window dreamily, and watching Kingsley disappear. She was roused from her abstraction by her father.

"Fairy, dear."

"Yes, daddy."

"Come here."

She came and sat by him.

"Have you seen much of this man, Kingsley?"

Her back was to the light; he could not see the quick

change in her face ; her hands grew hot and trembling, and yet to herself she did not acknowledge the truth. Women are slow in admitting that they love. Men look such a feeling in the face generally ; regret it, crush it, indulge it as the case may be, but recognise its presence quickly enough.

“ Yes,” she answered, “ I see him nearly every day at Kate’s or in the gardens.”

“ What do you know about him ? ”

“ Know about him ? ” she repeated, “ nothing except that he is a gentleman and was an officer : what more do we want to know about him ? ”

“ The man is trying to win your affections, Fairy.”

“ I am sure he is not,” said Ada, in a tone as if such a thing would be an insult to her, to him, and to every one in the world !

“ I am not a fool, child, I can read a man’s face tolerably well at my age ; besides, why did he offer to travel with us ? It was not for the pleasure of my society, was it ? ”

“ I do not know.”

“ He has been attentive to you ? ”

“ Not so much as to other people.”

“ Well—well, you like him, his company is pleasant to you ; take care, child, that you do not like him too much. He is a gentlemanly fellow enough ; men in the service generally acquire a certain polish which may only be skin deep. He admires you ; he is here to-day and away to-morrow.”

Ada felt a cold dread creep over her at the words.

“ Take your old daddy’s warning, don’t think about him too much.”

With sudden energy he added,—

“By Jove! I have no patience with men who wile away their idle days, by trifling with every innocent girl they meet!”

There was a step on the stairs, the doctor came in, and the conversation ended.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE QUARRELS OF LOVERS.

A sort of quiet seemed to have entered into the relation existing between Kingsley and Ada; a little more dignity of demeanour, which was yet not coldness. They met with more simple warmth, they seemed friends in a higher way. All that Colonel St. George had said had not in any way lessened Ada's pleasure in Kingsley's society; had not thrown the slightest shadow over her friendship for him. When did a father's counsel ever do so? She was a little hurt perhaps, at having been made the subject of an experiment. It was new to her to think of the effect of her actions, instead of simply acting out her impulses; but, in spite of the wound which Kingsley had given to her self-love, she had no fragment of resentment towards him; she had not a small nature.

A short time after Kingsley's visit to her father, Ada went out one day to walk off a feeling of restlessness which worried her. She had not gone very far before Kingsley joined her.

"Are you going far?" he asked.

"I am going up through the woods, I am tired of the gardens."

"So am I, may I go with you?"

They walked along silently for some time; suddenly Ada turned her head, and watched Kingsley's expression.

“I should like to know what you are thinking of?” she said, after a minute.

“I am thinking is there any cure for the lethargy that sinks down on one’s life sometimes, and paralyses one? You don’t understand it, I suppose, you are so young and full of vigour.”

“I do not like to be unsympathetic, but I never felt it.”

“You are not unsympathetic, you are just the contrary, for although your views of life, your feelings, your experience must be utterly different from mine, I feel more inclined to say what I think to you than to most people; in fact, to any one.”

She looked quite pleased at his words. He kept his eyes fixed on her, marking her lithe figure, her elastic step, the delicate brightness of her complexion and sorrowless expression.

“Do you mind telling me,” he said, “what you feel about life, what you look forward to, what ideal you have formed of happiness?”

“I feel as if life was very bright. I don’t know what I look forward to; every day brings something pleasant; I am seldom bored.”

“But the last question?”

“I do not think I have any ideal; it is too grand a word to express anything I feel.”

“Well,” he said impatiently, “never mind; your notion of happiness, what you would most prize?”

There was no evading his question. She felt it would be childish to answer jestingly. She was silent for a moment, and then her young fresh voice deepened in tone, and all the fire flashed in her southern eyes.

“To be loved as few women have been loved, and—to be worthy of it.”

He looked at her for some time without speaking.

"And my views, do you care to hear them?"

"Yes."

"I know there is much beauty in the world, and therefore goodness; the two are meant to go together, but I find most people either wicked or weak—which is rather worse. My ideal is a life of earnest labour and unflinching adherence to duty. But," he added, in a self-contemptuous tone, "so little do I work out my ideal that I am a good-for-nothing idler."

"We think so differently."

"Years hence, your views will have probably changed as mine have. Do you know, when I hear you talk, I seem to be listening to myself, as I was some fifteen years ago; only you are brighter and braver."

"Not braver, I am sure."

"I don't mean," he said smiling, "that you would knock a man down sooner than I would, or that I should run away from anything alarming! I mean that you have a fearless and enduring character, and to be brave is the first of all virtues, is it not? It means so much; a bright courage, not a dogged endurance, which always looks suffering, and asks for sympathy. How fine is the dignity that will not complain."

"I do not think it pretty or feminine to be afraid of everything."

"At any rate, you have not got the silly conventional timidity of most girls; if you had, you would have made a fuss about coming out alone with me."

"Why?" she said laughing. "What a funny idea! You do not look very ferocious."

How refreshing it was to meet a girl who had not been lectured about proprieties and improprieties, and

who was quite simple; nevertheless what would have been Kingsley's reflections, if Ada took a walk with Falkner, Vernon, or any of these men? The old conservative rules ought not to be thrown over, except in his favour!

"A mild young man," he said, laughing, "who discourses in rather a prosy way. Come, will you tell me your impression of me, without softening anything?"

"And in return?"

"I shall tell you what I think of you."

"Agreed. Well, I think—I think, I don't know, you are not too amiable in the first place; I think if you were angry, you would frighten me. You are proud and sensitive. If something had not worried you, and made you rather contemptuous about people, you would look at life in a simpler, brighter way."

"Do you say that at random, because you wish to appear penetrating, and you conclude that most men of my age must have had troubles in their lives? Or is it that I carry such a discontented face, that every one must say, there goes a disappointed man?"

"From neither of those reasons, but I suppose you mean me to understand that I have said something impertinent. You introduced the subject of yourself, and I say what I think—*voilà!*

"Am I to beg your pardon for being rude? I won't, I shall be rude if I like! Do you wish to be talked to as young ladies and young gentlemen generally talk to one another?"

"I don't know much about how they talk, but I should not think that my conversation was at all above the ordinary level. Nor yours either!" she said audaciously.

“Then you may as well add conceit to the list of good qualities you are giving me.”

“Of course, if you had not been conceited, you would never have introduced yourself as the topic of conversation !”

“You don’t really think that,” he said hastily, “you only say it to tease me. You cannot think that I care in the least what people in general think of me. I do care to hear your opinion, and therefore I separated you from the rest ; but I see my mistake.”

“How you take everything *au sérieux* ; can English people never understand a joke ?”

“Must Southerners be always frivolous ?”

“I am not, am I ? I talk seriously enough sometimes.”

“You are so variable in your moods ?” Kingsley said slowly, and with a puzzled expression. “You have more intellect than most women ; how is it you care to talk to such a fellow as Falkner ?”

“He is very amusing sometimes, he makes me laugh ; he is very polite ; why should I snub him ?”

Kingsley was beginning to feel worried. Could Ada not be serious for any length of time together ?

“Polite !” he said with a sneer, “that is no compliment to you ; he would be polite to any pretty woman, if she would minister to his vanity, by taking notice of him.”

“Why should I look for some ugly motive under his apparent good manners ?”

“I can’t make you understand,” he said impatiently. “To a man of that class, a young girl is not a being to respect, but to defame. He will be very courteous in his manner to her, oh dear yes, but if she is talkative

and agreeable, he will find a great deal in her words that she never meant, and will give his beautified edition of them to his friends, over his second bottle of wine. You find him amusing? Half his *jeu de mots* have a *double entente*, which, when you laugh, he credits you with understanding, and a significant glance at his men friends invites them to enjoy his joke, and your appreciation of it! Don't you think I've seen all this?"

Ada was grave for a minute, then she said,—

"I don't think you ought to have told me all this. It will make me uncomfortable. Why should I know that there are such ignoble, contemptible people? Above all, why should I think of the effect my words will produce on them? Am I to study to avoid the censure of such men as that?"

"I suppose I was wrong to say all this to you. I attempted to say it once before, and you would not listen; at that time my own conduct was blameable, and I could not say much, but now that I feel we are friends, I fancied you would not think it interfering or impertinent of me to speak."

"Neither do I," she said quickly, "but I can't look at things quite as you do. I do not like these people much, Mr. Falkner, Mr. Vernon, etc.—they do not give me any pleasure when they talk, but they are well enough, and they occupy far too trifling a place in my life for me to give my actions and words, relatively to them, a single thought."

After a minute of silence she added, "Let us say no more about it. Talk of something else. I feel in a good humour to-day; why should I allow the fascinating Mr. Falkner to disturb my equanimity?"

Ah! thought Kingsley, she is afraid of talking about

him. Why should she avoid the subject, if he were quite indifferent to her? He was accustomed to the society of women who readily cast a sneer at an absent admirer, when they are in the presence of a man they like.

Ada was in bright spirits; Kingsley was rather surly and silent. She looked mischievous, and inclined to tease him. Presently the path ran alongside a great incline, Ada went to the edge and looked down.

"You need not go so near," he said in a sort of growl. "I don't want to pick up the fragments of your body, and bring them home."

Ada did not seem to notice his speech, but stood looking down absently. Then she took up some pebbles, and dropped them over the rock, listening to the noise as they fell. Suddenly as she leaned forward, the ground under one of her feet seemed to give way; instantly Kingsley's arm was round her waist, and drew her back roughly. She looked up at him and laughed, but the laugh died away—his face was very white. He released her at once, and said,

"I beg your pardon; I thought you were really going to fall. I must say it was a silly amusement, and I fail to see the fun of it; it may be my English stupidity."

In that moment he had been terribly afraid, and terribly glad. It had only been a joke to her, and this emotion was aroused for her to laugh at.

"Of course it is," she answered, getting angry at his tone of voice. "I am not a hundred years of age, and you might easily have seen that it was only for fun, and that I was not going to fall."

He muttered something, but she did not hear what he

said, and was too cross to ask him to repeat it. So they marched homewards, making casual remarks, and trying to look as if they did not know that they had quarrelled.

When they were near home, Ada put out her hand,

“Our roads divide here,” she said. “Good-bye.”

“May I not see you home?”

“No. Good-bye.”

They shook hands, and Ada walked away. Presently Kingsley heard his name. He turned instantly, and saw Ada.

“I was in the wrong, and I was silly. There was no fun in frightening any one. There—”

Before he could answer she had turned away.

CHAPTER XVII.

“ IF DOUBT WERE NOT.”

COLONEL ST. GEORGE grew better; he was able to go out again daily for a little while. General Seaton came back for a few days to Homburg on his way to England, and his presence seemed to brighten his friend. Those autumn days seemed quite perfect in that ugly town. Ada and Kingsley grew ever more and more interesting to one another. Each to each was as a sublime work, of which the continued study unlocked the secret beauties; only they read this book in a different way; Kingsley sceptically, with a readiness to throw it on one side if it disappointed him; Ada with growing and unquestioning interest. Surely happiness is very nearly perfect in those days before love takes outward expression; when not one illusion is dispelled; when the two that love are encircled by a glory that makes them sacred; when they stand aloof from one another, the depths of their souls unpenetrated, and full of rich, satisfying possibilities?

The moment when we hold the cup of joy in our hands and know that we are free to taste it, is a more perfect moment than when we take the first draught of its contents; it may not be what we think it, and we may be thirsty still.

Kingsley was not hasty to tell Ada that he loved her.

Their intercourse was pleasant; each day's meeting was gilded by the prospect of a still happier one. What more did he want? Perhaps he feared any change, and wished that the knowledge of his love might steal upon her so gradually that the clear-spoken words could not surprise her. Perhaps the dubious ground he stood upon,—the feeling that he could advance or withdraw—had some charm. A man's acts at such times are seldom deliberate.

Kingsley was so entirely in earnest now, trifling with Ada was so far from his thoughts that he took it for granted that she must understand him. He forgot that truly he had not given her any positive reason for trusting him more than any other man. He forgot that the very timidity which grows from a girl's affection would make her shy of accepting by word or look a love which had not been actually offered to her.

Ada was sitting in the gardens one day when Kingsley came to talk to her as usual.

"I want to be amused," she said, making a little face "Voyons, what shall we play at?"

"You can play at being grown up," he answered laughingly.

"And you at being less cross?"

"Have I been so disagreeable?" he asked, taking a chair beside her.

"Sometimes, very!"

She tilted her hat forward to keep the sun out of her eyes, and looked at him mischievously from under the brim.

"Are all Englishmen as serious as you are?"

"You know several others, you can judge for yourself, the gay and fascinating Falkner for instance? We all are different."

"But you all pride yourselves on being English, which means—"

"A subtle combination of every virtue!"

"Which means," she went on with a laughing mischievous expression, "not seeing the fun of anything; always being quite sensible and looking it. Oh, how very awful!"

"I wish your father could hear you abuse his countrymen in this way!"

"Oh, papa's great, great, great-grandmother must have been an Italian, or he could not be half so nice as he is. Then he has been away from England for so long, the fogs have not got into his brain."

"I never was proud of having been in India before!"

"Oh, you've appropriated my remark to yourself, have you? I am sure all the time you were away you did nothing but growl at everything there, in concert with other men, and wish yourself back in the fogs."

"I don't think much of your pet Italians; lazy fellows who would be quite contented to lie in the sun all day and laugh at everything that passes; sentimental, fiery, uncertain creatures!"

"Sentimental? And why should they not be? You English think it is very fine to sneer at sentiment, but you have not got any in your composition."

"We do not hang about under windows howling something about 'cuore' and 'amore,' it is true."

"Luckily not, for your voices would not sound fascinating!"

"I acknowledge myself defeated. But," he added seriously after a pause, "you do not really like people to parade what they feel? If there is anything sacred in life you guard it from vulgar associations."

“From my point of view, it is cowardly to sneer at what, after all, is the only beauty of life—to accept apparently all the ugliness of the world, as if that were the only real thing, and never to give vent to a belief in something finer underneath it all.”

“How do you know,” she went on eagerly, “how—if people were brave enough to speak, and act up to their best thoughts—the world might be transformed? At present there is such a cold, practical standard of speech and conduct accepted, outwardly, that those that are just that all through, and nothing more, pass muster along with the rest, and we must credit them with fine, hidden thoughts.”

“You dreadful visionary,” Kingsley said with a loving look. “It would be just as bad the other way. If the noble-minded were in the habit of speaking what they really thought about life and the highest motives of action; the mean, narrow, material folks would express just as fine sentiments, and it would come to be a mere trick of expression which all alike would use.”

“Well, at any rate it would be infinitely better that the worst should ape the manners of the best, than that the higher should condescend to place themselves on a level with the lower.”

“When we speak to those beneath us in education, we suit our speech to their understanding; but we do not really lose our power of wider expression, do we?”

“I cannot argue with you, Mr. Kingsley, but I think I am right and you are wrong.”

“That is conclusive!” and he laughed at her gently.

“But tell me, what about your model Italian?”

“If you laugh, I can say no more.”

“Well, I won’t.”

"I think he is full of fine impulses, and is not ashamed of letting them be seen; if he does a generous act, he does not care whether it is noticed or not; if he is brave, it is not slowly and with dogged determination, but from a fine contempt of danger and death; if he cares for any one, he does not mind who sees it—he cannot conceal it from his every-day companions—it is a part of his life, and takes all the commonplaceness out of it—makes the day more beautiful—the sun brighter—nature more perfect."

"Is it less so for the Englishman? Or indeed for any individual in any nation, whom life has not brutalised?" He asked the question with a glow of earnestness in his face.

"I don't know; there seems such caution, such suspicion, in people, it appears to take the beauty out of everything."

"Perhaps the Southerners are so quick and frank, so unchecked in expression, because climate and nature is generous. If experience spoils one ideal for them, and takes the romance out of it, their poetic souls quickly grasp some fresh hope or love, and the old loss is supplied by a new gain; just as their soil is so generous that there is always renewed vegetation. While we, we nurture our ideal and hide it from cold blasts; we know it may not grow again, and we are suspicious of everything that may spoil it."

"I hate everything like suspicion, it poisons the air."

"Dear child," he said turning towards her with a tender gravity which always made her heart throb, "it seems right that you should look out on life clearly and frankly, but you must not be hard on those whom years of experience have brought to a different platform of

thought. It is just as if you could expect people of different ages to see equally well through the same telescope, without adjusting the sight. It would be very dreary if you did not start with belief in everything, and strong hopes of glorious results. I don't want you to see things quite as I do. It will come, I suppose."

"Which means that it is best I should remain childish and have merely the charm of a child, and that at my age I can't think?"

She said this in a vexed tone. Kingsley laughed a little.

"I do not mean that. I know you think a great deal, too much, perhaps—but how can you see the imperfection of life as I do—the kind of mildew that clings round everything?"

"How do you mean? Tell me."

It was almost a child's face, and yet with such keenness of perception in its every feature, such depth of thought in the clear dark eyes. Kingsley felt he could speak to Ada as he had never spoken to any one.

"There does not seem a virtue but its excess is vice; a pleasure but has some pain. Where does one find the friend or lover one dreams of? If a character has decision and firmness, it sees nothing but its own ends, and degenerates into obstinacy; if another is loving and gentle, with quick appreciation of the feelings of others, it scatters itself broadcast, and there is nothing left."

Ada sat with her hands folded, looking very grave.

"Then as to the pleasure and pain," he continued, "there is some defect in us which makes us quite incapable of fully estimating the joy we possess; we are always stretching forward nervously to something better and better, till some check comes, and then we do

nothing but look back, and what was so insignificant to us at the time seems more beautiful than anything ever can be again."

"I do think about those things," Ada said slowly, "though you think me too foolish to do so, and they puzzle me terribly sometimes; but it seems to me as if the mildew came from our own minds; it is not in the beautiful world. Perhaps if you think the firm are obstinate, it is only because they are opposed to you in something; and the gentle? they may not stand out alone in some fine labour or deed, but they may be like golden threads, running through other lives and making them more beautiful."

Kingsley smiled incredulously.

"That is certainly a nicer way of looking at it."

"If you don't feel pleasure, that must be your English nature," she added laughing, "for I am quite sure that every moment of my life is interesting and bright, and I like it."

"And yet, when you are a few years older, I am sure you will look back to these hours, and feel that you did not quite understand their beauty."

There was a silence after this, it seemed to them both a prophecy.

"Have I made you dull? That was bad of me. Perhaps you will never grow so cross as I am. Your very belief, and true, bright way of looking at things will make life give back to you all the truth and brightness you have in your own nature. You know how thoroughly Emerson believes in compensation? You have read him?"

"Yes; but when he says, that as much love as you give you will receive, I don't quite follow him. If I

love some one less than he loves me, will my less love reduce his, or will his greater love increase mine ? ”

She blushed a little as she spoke ; it seemed a subject to touch tenderly.

“ You puzzle me. *Fairies* should have clearer sight in such things than mortals ! ”

“ No, because they do not love, do they ? ”

“ I hope so, sometimes,” he said more seriously.

“ But you have not explained this, of Emerson’s, to me.”

“ I don’t know how it can be ; unless the stronger character compels the weaker to its own standard. If the strongest is the one that loves, it must surely hold the weaker in its power ; if it is the other way the weaker dies, as that it clung to dies. But there may be another meaning. You may give all your love to one person, and though it may not be returned by him or her, it may be given back to you in a hundred lesser loves.”

“ How horrible ! I hope that is not it. A thousand little rills may be very cheerful and pretty, but I don’t think they could make up for the absence of a great river ; do you ? ”

“ The rills are very pleasant and altogether safer ; every one can patter through a stream refreshingly, but you may be lost in the waves of a river, if you are not a strong swimmer.”

Another silence. The band began to play again, and no one came to break in on their conversation. General Seaton had carried off Colonel St. George to the gambling rooms to explain some wonderful theory he had about *Rouge-et-noir*.”

“ Fairy,” Kingsley said solemnly, “ do you think

you know what a great love is—even in idea? What it is capable of? How it views life?"

"I suppose," she said timidly, "it depends on the nature it grows in."

"I fancy," he went on, "with a girl like you, whose life has been quite simple, it is somehow this way: you meet a man you like, and things go smoothly; you speak your best thoughts to him, and he adapts himself to you, and you feel as though you had one nature; you feel in deeper moments that you could do much for him, in little and great things; then you drift on, in unquestioning trust in each other, in marriage. You have no idea of complex duties, of opposing feelings; no idea of a love that seems a sin, because of a duty; of a duty that seems a sin, because of a love. One cannot wish people to suffer, and yet can calm and intensity go together? Can one rely on untested affection?"

"You puzzle me dreadfully. Surely if one loves truly, it is not necessary to go through a great deal of misery to be sure of one's self."

"L'on n'est pas plus maître de toujours aimer, qu'on ne l'a été de ne pas aimer."

"Then there is no ease, there is no security ever—ever?" Ada said impatiently.

"I have always made one exception to that statement of La Bruyère's. I imagine if you love once so as to feel your whole soul and mind growing in purity and power from that love, it must be so absorbing, that once enthroned in the heart, there is no room for pretenders to sovereignty. But there are so often mistakes," he added, leaning forward and tracing figures on the ground with his cane.

Ada did not like the picture Kingsley had drawn of the love she was capable of.

"The quiet affection that you speak of," she said with emotion in her voice, "may be very enduring when it is tried."

"Do you think so," looking up with a start. "Who can tell?"

"I do not think," she said quickly, "that we have ever a right to test any one's love, to make experiments. Our own love must be very perfect to make us even wish to attempt such a thing."

"A man must know himself so much better than a woman," he went on, apparently paying no heed to what she had said. "Look at the life he leads, the temptation he is in! The varying life must show him what he is made of, unless he is a fool. He sees so many selfish, mean passions that men and women call love, that he ought to know the real thing when it comes. But a woman? She has, I grant you, much higher views, and if she has intellect above the generality her aims are altogether more elevated and spiritual; but what is the use of that if she does not know if they will hold good in action? How do you know if your ship will stand the strain, till a storm comes? She may go down, or she may ride a useless hulk on the waves. A woman may abandon everything because she is too weak to resist inclination, or she may cling selfishly to a dead law, and see no higher guidance in life than what she has learnt by rote in her childhood."

Ada looked yearningly at him. The strangeness of his conversation fascinated her, though she could not get at the secret of his thought. She felt a woman's

desire, by the simplicity and purity of her own life, to make things clearer to him somehow, and to change the current of his ideas, which out in the world—a world she had no knowledge of—had become confused and embittered.

It was no doubt an absurd way to talk to such a child as Ada; this flashed across Kingsley as he spoke, but he felt that her mind was following his with keen intuition and clear-sightedness.

No one had ever spoken to Ada like this before. She had all a child's eagerness to be Kingsley's equal in thought, to understand him so well that no word of hers should make him feel how young she was. So her varying face was full of expression, and her eyes led him on to say what was in his mind.

"I think women know their own hearts better than you imagine," she said firmly. "It would be very hard if they could never know right from wrong and choose clearly between them, because they don't know the world. If you are right about them, how do you suggest curing their defects, and making them understand?"

"I cannot answer your question. I often think, is it possible to understand without actual conflict with evil? Is it possible to count as a reliable soldier one who has never been in action? The only thing is to train yourself by the teachings of the great. I don't believe in picking your steps amongst books, with a weak fear; you won't trip if you have a just balance."

"And if I have not?"

"Then you had better sit down and have things handed to you; you will be a cripple all your life. You will never know your own strength."

Presently he added, "I have been talking in a

stupid way, have I not? And have been puzzling you?"

"It is very easy to find fault with things as they are, but what's the good of it unless you make them better?"

"Not much," he said carelessly, as if trying to get free from his thoughts, "besides it is inexcusable my talking in such a grumbling, moralising sort of way to you. You have not come to the stage of thinking that everything wants mending."

"I think I would commence mending myself first of all," she said archly.

He did not quite like that remark, but of course it was the natural conclusion of a child like Ada that everything he saw wrong was his own fault.

"After all," he said, a little bitterly, "your life will, most likely, be quite smooth. A light-hearted girlhood, a quiet married life, no burden of hateful ties, no poverty. Such a sunny life is possible, why should it not be yours?"

Ada felt pained, a keen sorrow smote her at his words. She did not see that what Kingsley said was half interrogation—that nearly all his conversation was with a view to sifting her character.

A fatal tendency to doubt and investigation was deep rooted in Kingsley's soul. A tendency which if it is traced through a man's life will always be found to mar his best thoughts and acts, and which—till he cast it bravely aside—will hold him back from all nobility of purpose and all true happiness.

"I don't think so," Ada said, almost passionately. "I do not feel it. I have not many people to care for; only my father and—"

She hesitated, for, though the thought of her father's death flashed across her, she could not give it utterance. Suddenly her life seemed to stretch out drearily before her as it had never done, and her bright childish dreams seemed to be quite blotted out.

"What were you going to say?"

"Never mind, I could not say it."

"Have you forgotten your dear friend Mrs. Bruton when you say you have no one to care for?"

There was a funny look in Kingsley's eyes as he said this.

Ada was pained—though she would not admit it to herself—because he had changed the conversation in this sudden way. When his words had filled her with vague tender thoughts, he had abruptly turned away from them to ridicule her friendship for Kate. She felt too that she did not care for Mrs. Bruton as she used to, and Kingsley's expression showed that he thought he had detected the change. She resented the accusation with childish indignation. All change of feeling towards our friends, when we are very young, seems like inconstancy, of which we believe ourselves quite incapable. Our hastiest and most childish intimacies, we believe, will be life-long attachments.

"No, I have not forgotten her, she is very kind. I have always liked her, and mean to do so always."

Kingsley looked at her with a slight smile as if he knew every little struggle she was making.

"Do not be angry with yourself because you are finding out that there was nothing really fine to love or admire in Mrs. Bruton. You must be true to yourself before you are true to your friends, or else your friendship will never be worth much."

“I have not found out much more of Mrs. Bruton’s character; she has faults, I know, but I can like her in spite of them.”

Kingsley looked incredulous, said nothing for a minute, and then remarked abruptly, “Mrs. Bruton has been of some use since she has been here. I ought not to abuse her. She has given me the opportunity of meeting you often; but I am ungrateful enough to think that I could have managed without her help.”

As he spoke, Mrs. Bruton appeared, and in her train her husband, Mr. Falkner and a Mr. Hamilton, a new addition to her admirers.

When Ada saw her coming she wished her father had been there or some one, so that she should not be alone with Kingsley.

He guessed her thoughts.

“A true friend,” he said with rather a triumphant smile, “ought not to make you feel uncomfortable.” When they came close, Kingsley got up and offered his chair to Mrs. Bruton.

“Why did you not come sooner?” he said. “The band has been playing your favourite *Abendlied*.”

As he spoke he raised his hat, and passed his hand over his brow, as if he were awaking himself most unwillingly.

“We were out riding and had such fun!”

The tone conveyed that he had lost much in not being of the party.

“You alone, Ada?” Kate asked.

“General Seaton has taken papa round the rooms; I am waiting till they come back.”

“Where did you ride?” Kingsley asked Mrs. Bruton.

His attention was sufficiently abstracted from her reply to notice that Falkner had come to the back of Ada's chair and was talking to her. "Why did you not come with us to-day, Miss St. George?"

"Because I was not invited," she answered laughingly, but in a low enough tone not to be overheard by Kate.

Ada felt puzzled about Kingsley. He had strong possession of her thoughts, but she struggled against it and felt angry with herself. She turned to Falkner rather eagerly to try, by talking to him, to get rid of the confused, pained sensation which she could not account for and did not like to think of.

Kingsley wondered what was the necessity for Ada to talk in a confidential, low voice to that fellow.

"I was wishing so much for you to be of the party."

"Why? I ought to be flattered!"

Ada was amused. His cool flirting way seemed absurd to her. She never thought of snubbing him; this seemed his natural manner.

"You ride so well, it is a pleasure to see you on horse-back, though the frightful old screws here are not fit for you."

"I knew the first time I saw you," he added, "that you were a good horsewoman."

Falkner seemed to Ada a man specially fitted to fill up spare moments by talking in this empty way.

"How did you arrive at that wise conclusion?"

"I knew it by your walk, your figure," (here he gave her an admiring glance, which he had often tried with others and found singularly effective), "your way of moving. Mrs. Bruton thinks she rides well, but though she is such a friend of mine, I must say she has no more idea of sitting a horse than she has of walking a tight rope!"

All this was necessarily said in a low tone.

“ Will you take a turn round the gardens ? ” he asked.

Falkner laid his hand on the back of Ada's chair as he spoke, and she got up. She did not care to go round the gardens, especially with him, but her father had not appeared, and she would not seem dependent for escort on Kingsley, who was listening to Mrs. Bruton and looking immensely amused at what she was saying. Ada came close to Kate.

“ If papa should come back, ” she said, “ before I return, will you say that I have just gone round the gardens and will be back in a few minutes ? ”

“ Yes, if I think of it, ” she answered without turning her head.

“ It is quite true, ” Ada heard her say to Kingsley, “ those Kursaal balls are stupid things, but you will come and help me to get through the evening ? ”

Falkner did not find Miss St. George amusing, and wondered why she walked at “ such a deuce of a pace ! ”

CHAPTER XVIII.

“PLEASURE, WITH PAIN FOR LEAVEN.”

DAY after day the external conditions of Ada's life were much the same, but her feelings and thoughts were changing. Even so, as the summer passes, each day looks much the same, and yet all are unlike in beauty. In the early morning, in the afternoon, in the evening, Kingsley met Ada; sometimes only a few words passed, sometimes they had a long talk. Thus it was there was no break in their intimacy, by which either of them could drop back into the old formality of early acquaintance. The friendship which in ordinary cases is extended over months and months, was crushed into a few weeks, and so gained power and force,—as the river imprisoned in a little space, swells and deepens. There was a joyousness in Ada's nature which Kingsley could not quite understand, which made her sometimes seem more childish than she was in reality. This child's gaiety of heart, he did not quite like; it was frivolous, he thought. There could scarcely be any depth where there was such readiness to seize each passing amusement. When they were long together Ada lost all mere conversational sparkle and grew doubly interesting to Kingsley. At such times she seemed to him unlike all other women; he forgot to suspect her of defects. When she was with others, he grew into the habit of watching her narrowly, and he

grudged her the pleasure she found in trifles—the merry laugh at some absurdity—the light, bantering conversation in which she shone from her wit and power of repartee. He knew how those men would talk of her. That they should even say she was a “jolly girl” seemed to him profanation. He forgot that had she been cold and stiff she would have been unnatural, and that bright frankness is often a glass through which you see the innocent mind, while a studied, guarded manner is as frequently an impenetrable wall behind which evil and suspicious thoughts lie hidden. He was impatient because she seemed so fearless and would take no warning. Her father was as an old fool, and there was no one to speak to her. Surely it was from no selfish motive that he wished her to be careful in her manner, and not give any encouragement to empty-headed men to boast of her familiarity. Of course it was nothing to him, he would go away in a day or two, and might never meet her again, but a girl like Ada always interested him. Was it not possible for any woman to be quite free from personal vanity. He wondered what would become of her. Mrs. Bruton said that Colonel St. George could not live very long, and in the billiard room last night he had heard one of those fellows say she would be very rich—an added danger to her beauty.

“A very good catch for a needy young man,” Falkner had said with a look at Hamilton, a fellow who was the *habitué* of every gambling place on the continent.

“All very fine,” he had replied, “but when one has rashly made oneself the *cavaliere servente* of a woman like Mrs. — she is so damned fond of you that she won’t let you speak to another girl.”

Kingsley, as he thought over this conversation, re-

membered the bad strokes that he had made, and knew that Falkner had observed it.

"A man of the world like you, Hamilton," Falkner had continued, "ought to know how to play your game; you could easily keep up your old friends, and yet avail yourself of new opportunities. Miss St. George is so easy to get on with, has such a nice free manner.

"If I were a younger man," he added in a languid tone, "I'd back myself to go in and win, but it is too much trouble."

Kingsley knew he had shown his rage though he had said very calmly, "It is well that your indolence saves you from the possibility of failure."

He knew also that as Falkner had shrugged his shoulders and said,

"Just as well," in an indifferent tone, he had looked across at Hamilton with a significant expression. "By Jove," Falkner had added, "if the old fellow croaks what a chance for a man of a sympathetic turn!"

All this annoyed Kingsley. True, this sort of thing happened every day; men talked very freely about any woman they met, but Ada was too young to be commented on, and a little more guardedness of manner would make it impossible for men to say what that scoundrel Falkner had said of her. Should he tell her? It would perhaps convince her that he was right in what he had said before on the subject, but still the repetition of such stupid, insolent talk seemed something too coarse and worldly for her to hear. He reserved his decision on the subject till he met her in the evening. He had not seen her all day, as he had had business letters to write which had kept him in. He was late in the

gardens, and at first he did not see her and was angry, as if it had been her doing. At last in a bend of the walk he came suddenly on her; she was with Falkner. Kingsley just lifted his hat and passed on. Why should he interrupt their *tête-à-tête*? She seemed to enjoy it. A few steps further on he met Mrs. Bruton, who did not so readily let him pass. She had come to a point in her flirtation with Mr. Hamilton when she thought a break might be agreeable; as to Hamilton he looked immensely relieved.

“Are you going to cut us all, Mr. Kingsley?” she asked. “You look as if you had lost all your money at the tables and were on the point of committing suicide. Let us do one good act in our lives,” she added turning to Hamilton, “let us divert him from his dreadful scheme.”

“How do you know that would be a good act?” asked Kingsley laughingly, joining her, and walking by her side.

“If you live, are your intentions so bad that it is better you should not have the chance of carrying them out?”

“Perhaps,” he said with a shrug of his shoulders.

Hamilton thought this a favourable opportunity for falling behind and leaving Mrs. Bruton to Kingsley, but she observed the movement and said to him,—“Don’t you think Mr. Kingsley ought to tell us what he was planning when he came up to us?”

“’Pon my word I don’t know, it might not be very interesting.”

“You are right,” said Kingsley, “I was making the very common observation, how very near of kin a fool and knave are.”

"Can't say I see it. A good knave is a long way off being a fool."

Mrs. Bruton not finding that this was a conversation in which she was likely to have a prominent part, said,—

"You are right in your supposition, Mr. Kingsley's thoughts were not interesting."

"Don't you see what an effort it was to me to remember them when they were dissipated by seeing you?"

"Very well turned off, Mr. Kingsley. You are pleasanter now. I hate men who are always making philosophical observations. I think my friend Miss St. George is right when she says that Englishmen don't know how to enjoy themselves."

"Englishwomen do, I imagine," said Hamilton with a sneer.

"Some," she said coolly, fanning herself with a conscious air of doing it gracefully.

"Your friend is a bit of a coquette, I fancy," said Hamilton who seemed in a peculiarly bitter vein to-night.

"All women are coquettes, I believe; Ada is young, pretty, rich, and spoilt; what can you expect?"

Kingsley listened angrily, but how could he wince without betraying a tender feeling, which he denied even to himself; besides, any conversation about Ada had a fascination for him; he would see where it led to, perhaps they knew more about her than he did. So he was silent, listening attentively.

"It would take a man all his time to manage a girl like that, I fancy," said Hamilton.

"She is a very nice girl. Her father is perhaps foolishly indulgent, and that is apt to make a girl heartless."

"I do not think so," Kingsley said quietly (he had

full command of his voice and manner now), "except in a bad nature, and you would be very unwilling to admit that your friend had that."

"Of course I should, but indulgence makes girls selfish, makes them believe in their own judgment and no one else's, and what can they know of the world?"

There was enough truth in what Mrs. Bruton said to make it appear not altogether spiteful, and yet when she had begun to speak Kingsley expected nothing but the false friendliness in which a worldly woman indulges when her friend is not present. The hardest judgment is never entirely wrong, thought Kingsley, and though one can't respect Mrs. Bruton, she may have given very sound advice to Ada, and be hurt at her rejection of it. Very sound advice no doubt, but Kingsley forgot to look into the motive, which to Ada made itself felt!

"Much better they should not know anything of the world," muttered Hamilton.

Mrs. Bruton turned coolly towards him, and said with a light laugh, "That they may be made fools of by men like you!"

Hamilton bowed and bit his lip. Kingsley felt very awkward; all such ugly speeches from a woman seemed to him so vulgar that it was unpleasant to his refined, sensitive nature to listen to them. He was glad that Mrs. Bruton had snubbed Hamilton, but was sorry that he had been there to hear it.

After all a man is lenient to a woman's faults and misdoings unless they offend him personally, then there is no excuse!

Poor woman, thought he, what is to be expected when she is married to a man like Bruton? Perhaps she feels what a mistake her own life is, and wishes Ada's to be as different as possible.

So for the moment Kingsley credited Kate with an amount of generous humility which never existed for an instant in her breast.

After a minute Hamilton stopped to speak to some one, and Mrs. Bruton and Kingsley strolled on together.

"My friend Miss St. George is really quite a child," Kate continued as if she were defending her to Kingsley, "and it is not fair to expect her to have much steadiness or depth. She is caught by admiration and attention. Mr. Falkner admires her very much and is doing his best to turn her head. You have perceived it, of course?"

"Oh, yes," he answered laughing, "Falkner is a miserable victim!"

"And Ada is silly enough to like him. Don't you think so?"

"I do not know. I am afraid I have not watched Miss St. George closely enough to observe it."

"Well, I have, as I take a great interest in her."

"If the fancy is mutual why should it be silly of her?" Kingsley said carelessly.

"It is nothing more than a fancy on Mr. Falkner's side. Il s'amuse, voilà tout."

"Are you able to see through men so well, Mrs. Bruton? You are young for such penetration."

"I have learnt a great deal in not the pleasantest way," she said with a slight sigh. "As to Ada," she went on, clinging to the subject, "I wish I could think she did not like Mr. Falkner, but—"

"But?" he repeated carelessly.

"She changes the subject when I speak of him. There is an indescribable something in her manner. Surely you have observed it?"

“We men have not got a woman’s acuteness in discovering ‘an indescribable something.’”

They came up to Ada and Falkner again. They were laughing, but if Kingsley had been near he would have seen a very weary look in Ada’s face. They all stopped and began to talk together for a few minutes. Kingsley drew close to Ada. He felt himself more truly her friend than any of them. Why should he not do all the good he could? He was going away soon.

“Have you enjoyed your walk?” he asked.

“Yes, it is a beautiful night, but I am tired now, and am going home.”

Did she want to avoid talking to him? It looked like it. He felt more desirous of being alone with her.

“May I see you home?”

She looked surprised at the question. She thought it unnecessary.

“Of course.” Then she added simply, “All the rest will come too, which will be a bother.”

He felt a momentary exultation, but repressed it. After all Falkner had been accorded the same privilege of walking alone with her.

“Take a turn round the gardens first, and we can go out at the far entrance.”

So they dropped back a few steps from the rest, and turned into a side walk.

They were silent for a while, and then Kingsley could not resist leading to the subject of Falkner—as those who suffer are seldom brave enough to forbear allusion to their pain.

“Did Mr. Falkner regale you with any anecdotes of his irresistible power and fascination?”

“No. He was very amusing part of the time. He

has seen a great deal, and has such a languid, conceited way of speaking of his experiences that it always makes me laugh."

"I fancied," Kingsley said impatiently, "that you were in some degree a judge of character. Can you not see that Falkner is a conceited fop, whose whole and sole occupation is to smile or sneer away a woman's reputation?"

Kingsley imagined that he had put away all personal feeling, and would now speak to Ada on higher ground—solely for her own good.

"I think you are mistaken. His compliments are so stupid and transparent that he must know he is laughed at; in fact, I should think he paid them for that purpose. Even his conceit is only an affectation to make himself more amusing."

"Amusing! You must be wonderfully fascinated if you think that," he said with an uneasy laugh. "I suppose I shall be considered very disagreeable if I tell you something?"

"Tell it, please."

"I don't know how a girl of your quickness and intellect can be so deceived. Falkner is without exception one of the most contemptible curs I ever came across. It will open your eyes, perhaps, if I tell you what occurred last night. They were discussing you in the billiard-room. I have told you, I think, that men do such things often. Part of the conversation I will not retail to you, but Falkner, with that languid air which you think amusing, said, "Miss St. George is so easy to get on with, has such a nice free manner that if I were a younger man I would back myself to go in and win, but it is too much trouble."

After a moment of astonished silence, Ada said, "It is a very ugly story, and if I had been you I think I would have forgotten it as soon as possible, instead of remembering such impertinence so accurately!"

Kingsley did not feel inclined to admit that he had been wrong, but defended his position hotly, trying, a little unjustly, to make Ada feel that her indignation was ingratitude.

"Of course I have no right to tell you of these things, I am nothing to you, nor you to me; I may never see you again when I leave this, but I was foolish enough to think that you recognised the friendship I had for you, and would allow me the privileges of a friend."

At first when Kingsley had told Ada this story, her indignation was somewhat softened by the thought that only strong personal feeling could ever have made him repeat it. Now that he ended by showing her that they were utterly separated in every way she was more angry and hurt.

Kingsley, on his part, imagined that he was showing Ada how disinterested he was in his advice, and he was unwilling to let her suppose that it was mere jealousy of Falkner which actuated him in repeating his words.

"I have always allowed you to say what you like," she said, "I am only sorry that you should have felt inclined to tell me what you have just done. A true friend is, I think, one who would see me and my acts so strongly in the light of his own understanding of, and belief in me, that no coarse remark or jest at my expense would make the slightest difference. Would a true friend prefer that I should regulate my manners and actions for the sake of avoiding the contemptible gossip that you men indulge in? I should imagine he would rather that

I did not know the ugliness of life, but was simple and truthful to every one."

Was it the moonlight that made her face so white? Alone with Ada, Kingsley shared her simplicity of thought; away from her he listened to the distrust that experience had taught him. Just now he felt he had been wrong, but tried to defend himself.

"You cannot by imagination put yourself in my place?"

"I cannot, I confess."

"Am I by a mistaken counsel to lose your confidence?"

"I think you are kind, Mr. Kingsley, but friendship is not strengthened by watchful distrust, but by a confident belief that your friend, in acting according to his nature, will see what is beautiful, and be like it in mind."

There were tears in her voice. How could he tell her all he felt without an acknowledgment that it was more than friendship he felt for her? They turned out of the garden now,—it was not very far to her house.

"I am very sorry, Miss St. George, I wish I could feel as you do about things, but that is impossible; you ought to forgive me for my officiousness. If I did not think, child, that you were something better than others, something too good, too sweet to be cavilled at, or for your name to be on the lips of men like that—I would not trouble myself about it."

She was softened and gave him her hand.

"I forgive you," she said smiling; "but you must not make a fuss about nothing again. I talk to any one, that is my way. I feel so gay sometimes, I could dance by myself. I cannot trouble my head with suspicions of people, I would rather think well of every one and enjoy myself."

Already she seemed to have forgotten her anger. Kingsley's own life had been so stern and sad that this child-nature was beyond his understanding. He remembered how Mrs. Bruton had alluded to her heartlessness, and much as he despised the speaker, the words dwelt in his mind. How could Ada feel so gay when her father was ill, dying! She left him alone to seek her own silly pleasures. Kingsley could not see that her love for him drew her out day by day and blinded her to her father's state, and that if she could have traced the cause of her joyousness, it was this same love which brightened everything. She did not quite know it—she was, as it were, sailing with the wind, she could not know its power till her course was changed.

They reached the Untere Promenade, and Ada asked Kingsley to go in. He felt a desire to see her with her father, so went up. Colonel St. George was writing, and when they came in, looked up with a smile, which he meant to be cheerful, but his face was pale with suffering, and as he spoke there was pain in his voice.

"You are ill to-night, daddy," Ada said, running to him with concern in her face.

"Rather a sharp attack, Fairy, but I shall be better by-and-by. Won't you sit down, Mr. Kingsley, I thank you for walking home with my daughter."

"You are suffering very much, Colonel St. George; will you not have advice? Let me call in Dr. Müller."

"No, thank you, I am accustomed to it. Doctors cannot do me any good."

"Had you a nice evening?" he said, turning to Ada. "Did you see all your friends?"

"Yes, and got a lecture from Mr. Kingsley, but I have forgotten all about it now."

"It has not had much effect, what has driven it out of your head?"

"You. Why are you in pain, daddy?"

She stood beside her father, and put her hand on his head, with a loving gentleness which made her beautiful in Kingsley's eyes, for there was no show about it; it was simply that Kingsley's presence had to her no foreign element in it, and she was unchecked in her emotions before him.

Colonel St. George looked at Ada, proudly and sadly.

"I have pain often, only you do not always find it out."

Kingsley would have liked to stay with them awhile; to feel as if he had some part in their life. It seemed to him that he had never been necessary to any one, it was absurd to expect it now. He got up.

"I must go, Colonel St. George. I am sure you ought to be in bed. Will you not see Dr. Müller, I should like to do something for you."

"I will go to bed, I want rest."

As he spoke, such a weariness was in his face.

"Good-night."

He drew his breath with sudden pain as he spoke.

Kingsley wished that Ada would go down to the door with him, that he might tell her to send for him if her father became worse and she wanted any one. But she said good-night, and did not leave the room. He did not like the look in Colonel St. George's face; he had seen a great deal of sickness and death, and knew most of their aspects. It seemed so desolate for that poor child to be alone in any emergency. Certainly Mrs. Bruton was the last woman for a time of trouble,

she could be no use or comfort, but what could he do? As he thought of it all walking home, he felt such a longing to be by her side in any sorrow that might come to her, that it took the form of a resolution to tell her how he loved her.

Ada was not at the springs in the morning, and after walking about a great deal watching for her, he turned to her house. He inquired for Colonel St. George, but the servant could not tell him how he was. Kingsley was delighted with her stupidity, as it gave him an opportunity of sending up to inquire. After a few minutes' delay, Ada came down herself. She looked sad, the more so because her face was usually so bright.

"Your father is better, is he?" Kingsley asked, taking her hand and holding it while he spoke.

"Yes, a little, but he is not so well as usual, and the doctor is coming again."

"You are not frightened about him?"

"Oh! no, but I cannot bear him to be ill."

"Shall I see you in the afternoon?"

"Perhaps. I don't think it is likely."

"May I come and see you?"

"No, papa is not equal to seeing any one."

"You are not going to the ball to-night, I suppose?"

"No, I don't think so. Are you?"

"Mrs. Bruton made me promise to go."

"I thought you did not care for such things."

"Neither do I."

"Then why do you go?"

"I thought you would be there."

"I should enjoy a ball so much," she said regretfully. "I have looked forward to it for so long, but I would not like to leave papa."

"I don't think you ought."

"It is not from a sense of duty I stay with him," she said quickly, "it is because I wish it."

"I am sorry you will not be at the ball to-night."

"That was a long time coming!"

"You know quite well I am sorry," he said impatiently; "what do I care about dancing or nonsense of that kind."

"I don't think it is nonsense. I am quite happy when I am dancing; it gives me such pleasure that I can't stop when I once begin."

Could there be very strong feeling in any one, for whom mere physical motion had such delight? Kingsley was not inclined to be censorious this morning, and though this thought flitted across his mind he did not dwell on it.

"I am sorry, for your sake, that you should miss any pleasure."

Sorrow seemed so near her now, that Kingsley felt ashamed of having ever grudged her a moment's light-heartedness.

"Then I shall not see you till to-morrow?"

He did not look as if he liked it.

"No, I suppose not, good-bye."

All this time he had held her hand in his.

"Good-bye, Fairy," he said gravely; "send to me if you want me for anything, will you?"

She nodded, returning the pressure of his hand, and then he turned away. She stood watching him till he disappeared. Just before going out of sight he turned and waved his hand to her. She was standing in the doorway, in a dress of faint blue; the sunshine fell aslant upon her hair and brought out the gold that lurked in it.

here and there ; a slight smile was on her lips. Kingsley remembered this picture for many a day.

In the afternoon Kingsley met Mrs. Bruton ; she told him that Ada was going to the ball. He was surprised, and did not like the tone in which Mrs. Bruton spoke. It was as though she said—"Don't ask me what I think of it, for it would be exceedingly painful to me to say." Commend me to a spiteful woman for putting shades of meaning in her voice !

The influence of Kingsley's last interview with Ada was still strong with him ; he would think no ill of her ; her father was probably much better

This was truly the case. Colonel St. George had been much freer from pain as the day advanced, and had pressed Ada to go to the ball. He was unwilling to deprive her of any pleasure, and he expected his brother and preferred meeting him alone.

CHAPTER XIX.

“DANS UNE HEURE TOUT S'ENFUIT.”

KINGSLEY walked slowly to the Kursaal. For a long time he had not been at a ball. He had come to look upon such amusements as a most senseless way of spending time, yet he could not lose the chance of seeing Ada. Here he was, passing all the time he could in the society of one whose ideas and pleasures were so different from his. Having acquired the habit of thinking much about things, and if possible explaining them to himself, he began now to try and account for the strange interest he took in her. He meant to have passed but two days at Homburg; to look after that youngster, son of an old college chum of his, and then to go on to Florence. There he planned to live a year, amongst the spirits of the great men who had glorified it in centuries gone by, and who—unseen save by those who honoured them—still dwelt in the city where they had laboured and triumphed. This man Kingsley was filled with the most utter scepticism about the purity and truth of men and women; yet in spite of this, a kind of ideal of something finer than the world had yet shown him, lingered in his heart, a hope that some time in his life he would find among human beings a simple nature that saw clearly and walked forward unswervingly.

General distrust in goodness does not always argue a

bad mind. I maintain this in the face of many contrary statements. I have heard a great man say, "The more one sees of the world, the more hopeless does it appear, morally and intellectually ; it is only when one's knowledge is confined to a few aspiring souls that one feels that the regeneration of life is possible."

For Kingsley life had been unfortunate. He had just seen that side of it which tended most to make him unbelieving. Five years of military life, and most of that spent in India, is not a good school for seeing the sweetness and nobleness of human nature. Living amongst a number of idle men whose chief occupation is to kill time, and chief ambition is to be utterly indifferent to everything, and who delight in showing themselves incapable of supposing that any action has a motive which corresponds to its outward seeming—is not likely to mature trusting thoughts ! Then there was the station life of India, where all that is petty and frivolous in woman's nature seems to flourish and develop itself with rank luxuriance. Some men find their safeguard against all this withering influence in the old associations of their home and childhood, the remembrance of their mother or sisters ; others in the love of some one woman who makes the world good to them through the medium of her pure and unselfish existence : but Kingsley ? You must know what he had to look back on. A little sunny childhood, so far away that it was dim in the distance ; then his mother's death. After that the schoolboy days, spent side by side with an elder brother to whom the tie of kinship was no bond of love. Geoffrey Kingsley outshone his brother physically and intellectually. He had the ready talent which lacks thoughtfulness somehow—if that be possible—and an

inherent force of character which never turned aside for anything or anybody; which force would have been admirable in a finer nature with more sensitiveness and more nerve.

In college life the two brothers were together, *i.e.*, they were in the same college, but their friends were different, their life was different.

Herbert had a keen sense of honour, a romantic and not altogether despicable feeling of having inherited the blood of an honourable line, on whose name was no stain, and so he was a little bit sensitive about things, and was more truthful than is the wont of young men. There was a chronic sneer on the part of Geoffrey against what he termed his brother's thin-skinnedness.

They had a father and sister living; the sister, a querulous and fanciful invalid; the father, an old man of infinite courtesy, strict principle, and very limited ideas. In complete ignorance of each other's natures, the family grew up side by side. Herbert gave all his affection to his sister, who simply tolerated him, and thought Geoffrey in every way his superior.

There was always a sort of mystery about Geoffrey's life and Geoffrey's friends, but no one thought of questioning him. "He was an uncommon character." "He knew what he was doing." "He would make his own way in the world." The truth being that he was utterly unscrupulous, and that whatever hindered him in his path was trodden under foot without a quiver; but being brilliant, with somewhat of the refinement of ancestry resting on him, he was just the sort of man whom women would never suspect of being cruel, until some extraordinary circumstances might bring that quality to light.

After Geoffrey left college he went abroad. He travelled for a year in Italy, during which time, without effort he became master of the language. He had all the talents calculated to make an agreeable man of the world ; was a good linguist, a good musician, and seemed to please without study. Old Mr. Kingsley conceived the idea that the accomplished Geoffrey was admirably suited for the diplomatic service. It was decided that he should begin his career as an attaché ; he acquiesced in this arrangement, and previous to finding some suitable opening abroad, he lounged away his time at home, without definite study or occupation. He absented himself very much from Old Court without explanation ; thereupon followed scenes with his father, which always ended in the discomfiture of the old man. Finally Geoffrey announced that he was engaged to a girl who had been on a visit to one of the neighbouring families.


Miss Westbrook was penniless, therefore the engagement was disapproved of, but in this as in all other things Mr. Kingsley was overruled by Geoffrey, and his *fiancée* was received at Old Court. It did not promise to be a calm courtship. Miss Westbrook was a beauty who liked admiration, and was not at all contented that it should only be given by her betrothed. In this girl, Geoffrey met, for the first time, one he could not bend to his will, and this, by some fatal fascination, seemed only to make him more desirous of subduing her. He watched her every look with a fierce love which seemed all jealousy, while she would not brook his domineering ways, but treated him with insolent indifference ; it seemed a battle between them who would make a slave of the other. Thus months went by, lookers-on prophesying that the engagement must come to an end. Sometimes

things seemed to go smoothly, and the public interest in the courtship ran low; more frequently they kept apart, and from the fierce, restless look in Geoffrey's eyes, and the defiance on Miss Westbrook's lips, their acquaintances indulged in many a wonderful conjecture, as far wrong as most suppositions are when suggested by senseless curiosity. Some women enjoy the caging of a beast that is always showing its teeth; perhaps it is like tiger-hunting to men, the danger is half the fascination.

One summer's day Geoffrey came back to dinner in one of his worst moods. He drank deeply and pushed aside the food that was offered to him, as men do when any solid morsal chokes them, and they crave wine to make the pulse keep pace with the fever throb of the brain. Dinner over, in the dusk of the summer's evening he went out, with a strange fixed look upon his lips. As he passed his brother at the hall door he said he was going to see Miss Westbrook, and then walked swiftly away.

It was late at night when Herbert heard Geoffrey return; he noticed dreamily the noise of his door shutting, and then fell asleep again.

At early dawn every one was roused to hear the ghastly news that Miss Westbrook was dead. It was the common-place tragedy of passion, jealousy and death; whose details are read with such morbid interest, and talked over with much indignation and excitement. Each one who has known the actors in it, points out to his acquaintances how he had all along thought it would end thus, and traces in the most trivial former actions of the murderer, some indication of his diabolical character. While every one seizes on the most trifling incident which may add to the horror of the story, the



true tragic element is oftentimes unseen, as in most events of life.

Geoffrey Kingsley was arrested. The testimony of his brother—given truthfully and reluctantly—decided his committal. The trial took place, and as far as could be learned, Geoffrey had struck his betrothed in a fit of ungovernable rage on learning that she had deceived him. The sentence was penal servitude for life. Nothing was admitted by Geoffrey; he was sternly silent and heard his sentence without a word, not gratifying the morbid sensationalism of the crowd in court, by evincing any emotion or even changing colour. Before a month had passed, he was on his way to Australia, a convict.

In brooding over this dreadful tragedy, Herbert found it impossible to free himself entirely from blame. He remembered how with a young man's love of "chaff," he had often irritated Geoffrey by suggesting that some other fascinating fellow would probably "cut him out" with Miss Westbrook. He remembered, too, how, on the very morning of that fatal day, he had invented an elaborate story about Miss Westbrook on purpose to provoke Geoffrey. It was a foolish story, laughingly told and forgotten as soon as spoken, but having far more truth in it than he supposed. Now it all returned to Herbert's mind, with dreadful distinctness, and he seemed to see that it had helped to goad his brother to that act of madness.

If Herbert had had the presence of mind to absent himself instantly from the country, his condemnatory evidence would have been wanting, and it was within the bounds of possibility that the trial might have gone differently.

The guilt and misery of others seemed wound into

Herbert's life, and in such a way that it seemed in part his doing. This he was made to feel painfully in his own home, for his presence became intolerable to his sister, who saw in him the cause of Geoffrey's fearful fate. He entered the army, and was ordered to India. After five years, his sister died, and his father being left quite alone, Kingsley sold out and lived with him until his death, which happened some years later. After this Kingsley left Old Court, and travelled from place to place. He could not live in a spot associated with so much misery. He was sensitive, too, about accepting an inheritance which came to him through the sin of his elder brother, although the property was legally his; his father having disentailed the estate on the condemnation of Geoffrey, and left it to his younger son.

Thus the rats and mice had undisturbed possession at Old Court, and the income derived from the estate accumulated, without Kingsley having any distinct idea as to what use he would put it.

Some men spoil their own lives; some men take the ill-luck second-hand. Kingsley was of the latter class. He had not a pleasant family history to look back on. Of his kindred, two were dead, and the third, with the stamp of guilt upon him, was worse than dead. Some curse seemed over them all. For Kingsley the notion of creating happiness for himself—of making life fine by some determinate purpose—seemed to have no power. His life had been, to the letter, honourable. He had stood aloof from men. He did not claim their fellowship, therefore gave them no right to remember his fatal family history. To women, he had been kind but cold. With some he had felt much sympathy, but they had failed to understand a frank friendship in the way it was

meant, being too little of mind. By others he had been fascinated, nay infatuated, up to a certain point, but he found his conquests too easy, and his disappointment too great, for his infatuation to be of long duration. He let life bring events to him; he tried not to rule them. Of the joy of human fellowship and affection, of the earnest struggle to work out that which his heart told him was best; of real, intense life full of human emotions, human pains and pleasures, he knew nothing.

Yet Kingsley was no weak-minded man. He did not take the foolish twaddle of the world and cling to it as to something sacred, but the mildew of inaction, the web of cold doubt and speculation, clung to him.

Of this mind was Kingsley when he came to Homburg. We have seen how his daily association with Ada pleased him, till a desire really to understand her character grew strong within him—easy enough to understand, heaven knows, if he had read it simply, and had not brought his worldly knowledge to bear on it! We have seen how at one time he had thought Ada was but a repetition of that aspect of the feminine nature which he had so often seen. Then had followed that not altogether justifiable experiment of his which led to deeper feeling and the recognition of the injustice of his judgment. Slowly and strongly grew in Kingsley the resolve to win Ada, and to-night he had determined to ask her in simple and unmistakeable words to be his wife. He had determined to throw all his jealous suspicions to the winds, to yield to his impulse; to have a right to guard her in her childish ignorance from all harm, and to stand by her in the loneliness which her father's death might bring. He was full of the buoyancy which comes from having cast away hesitation, and arrived at a final decision.

When the moment is past which displayed some weakness in our character ; when there seems no probable event likely to bring it into prominence again, we sometimes recognise its existence. Kingsley acknowledged to himself to-night, that perhaps some thread of that jealousy which had woven such a fatal web for his brother, ran through his own character and must be torn out. Utterly foolish and groundless seemed his distrust of Ada in the new light of his fixed resolve, and in the stretch of time that lay ahead he could see no turn of the loom which would bring it athwart his life again. With this new pure love, of this innocent girl, his life seemed suddenly to change, and duties, earnest action, vitality, seemed to cluster round it.

During all these years Kingsley had not quite lost sight of his brother, and just before coming to Homburg tidings had reached him that Geoffrey was dead. Typhus fever had been raging amongst the convicts, and Geoffrey had been one of its victims. The truth of this news had not been at the time fully assured, but some few days ago he had received further confirmation of it. With sympathy and grief for the miserable life thus ended was mingled a feeling that this was the last link with old sorrow which had dropped off from him. He stood alone in the world with no tie holding him back to painful memories. From the possession of his old home he could not now, by the utmost stretch of honourable feeling, shut himself out. It seemed his duty by a life of high aims to clothe with honour the name to which had clung such disgrace. In any grief that comes to men, there is often some selfish compensation which they do not analyse their own hearts sufficiently to recognise. We all feel that happiness at some time in our lives is

our right, and we gain a little false courage from the inward assurance that a good time is coming. Kingsley was feeling to-night that his good time was drawing near. He was early at the Kursaal, the ball had not begun, so he walked round the gardens thinking.

Was it possible that Ada's life and his could be joined and flow smoothly on? The world had taught him so much, and her so little. She did not know herself at all; hers was a nature which as yet had had no reason to be self-watchful, but it was not wanting in depth. Child as she was, Kingsley was not sure of his success. He knew it might be easy enough to win a woman's fancy, but to win a deep and lasting love was another thing. Men are apt to confound the two; hence the flippant and altogether contemptible way in which they speak of their conquests.

Should he tell her his life? Would she understand his feelings if he did? Might she not be touched, and take a weak romantic interest in him, which she might mistake for love, and so deceive herself and him? Or—what was more likely—might she not in her unthinking ignorance, shrink from him, as from one associated somehow with crime? If she were only simple and truthful—surely she was so—all might be well. She would not disguise her feelings, he would read her rightly. So with strange emotion he turned into the Kursaal ball-room.

The light flashed on Kingsley as he entered, with a painful glare, after the soft duskiness under the trees. It did not take a moment to see that Ada had not yet come, so he leaned his back against a pillar and waited. Why should he try and shut out all the poetry there might be in life for him? Hitherto existent realities

had been ugly, any possible beauty had been merely an intellectual recreation, read of in books, dreamt of perhaps in quiet hours, but practically unknown to him.

A ball-room was not such an odious place after all; people looked happy, and it was pleasant to see such a strange jumble of beings, bristling with their social distances and petty dignities!

Kingsley had looked away from the door for a minute, and when he turned his head again in that direction he saw that Ada had come. She looked very soft and fair, dressed in some cream-coloured texture, but so subordinate was her dress to her own beauty, that it was only to be remarked because it ministered to her gracefully.

Kingsley took a step forward, but before he could reach Ada she was surrounded by all the "Bruton set." We do not know what changes of feeling we are capable of! All the quiet, hopeful thoughts of the past half-hour were swept clean out of Kingsley's mind. He held back, while an animated conversation was going on, the burden of which, he felt sure, must be numerous engagements with those objectionable men, who would seek to monopolise her society. She had not even looked round to see if he were there. Could it be possible that he was no more to her than any of those fools!

While Kingsley thought thus, Ada had begun to dance. It was an artistic pleasure to see her move. Her slender, perfectly-balanced figure seemed to breathe the music, and give form to its sound. She was pretty to watch, but this pleasure was modified, nay destroyed, and made a pain by the foolish anger in his heart.

Why should that fellow dance with her, and put his

arm round her waist; and why should she look as though she enjoyed it? What a mass of hypocrisy and humbug there was in the world! Why should it be more right to be thus familiar in a ball-room than in the day?

It is true that Ada looked as if she enjoyed herself. Her southern nature vibrated to sound and motion, her lips parted, and her eyes deepened in colour. She stopped close to Kingsley, and in a simple childish way looked towards him, as if to ask him to share her enjoyment. She seemed surprised that there was no responsive smile in his face, and turned away disappointedly, and recommenced dancing.

Kingsley felt ashamed of himself, and when an opportunity occurred he followed Ada, and asked her to dance.

"Do you know," he said, as they walked about together, "that I cannot dance a bit."

"Then why did you ask me? Are you sure?" she added quickly. "Perhaps you are too diffident."

"I can go round and keep time, but there is no spring, no enjoyment, in my dancing."

"Will you try with me?"

"I will if you like," he said, for in truth though he cared not for the amusement, and knew he could not do it well, he was foolishly desirous that no other man should hold her more tenderly and familiarly than he had done.

So they commenced. Kingsley had not at all done himself injustice when he said he could not dance.

True, he kept time, but he was utterly unbendable; an automaton would have taken just as graceful movements! They struggled once round the room, and then stopped.

Ada looked half amused, half disappointed.

"No," she said, laughing, "it was not over-modesty, you cannot dance!"

It is not pleasant to fail in anything, even though you knew beforehand that you could not do it; it is mortifying to have attempted it.

"I told you I could not," he said, falling back on that as some consolation. "This is the first night in my life that I have really wished to be able."

"It seems so natural to dance, I can't understand how any one cannot do so, unless they are crippled! Which," she added laughingly, "you certainly are not."

"Perhaps I am mentally or morally crippled, for what you think natural is no enjoyment at all to me."

"Perhaps," she said, as if considering the matter seriously, "it is a childish amusement, and when I am as old as you are, I may not care for it."

"That does not explain the difficulty, for I never cared for it. But how old do you think I am? I shall see at what age you think all such amusements may be at an end!"

How a man who is in love delights in making all conversation personal, delights in turning the attention of her he loves to the most insignificant details about himself!

"I can't guess your age. If I were to say what I think, you might be offended; if I left a margin for vanity, I should be hypocritical."

"Say what you think, it will amuse me."

She put on a pretty little air of consideration, and at last said slowly and interrogatively,

"Thirty-six?"

"Three years too much, but that is a fair guess, allowing for the unflattering effects of an Indian climate."

“ I knew I should guess wrongly.”

They were both silent for a minute. Somehow they seemed a little more formal with one another to-night, less freely friendly and unshackled in their intercourse. Was it that they both recognised that they could not drift on longer in the same way, and that the atmosphere was suddenly changed from its former calm ?

“ Don't you find that there is something unreal in the light and glitter, and everything ? ”

“ That is what makes it so delightful,” she said with childish glee ; “ we get quite enough of humdrum, real things.”

“ I was going to ask you to come on the verandah,” he said, with slight disappointment in his voice, “ but I must conclude you prefer staying here ? ”

The band had begun to play again, and that important fact had not escaped Ada's excited ear !

“ I must dance, it is so seldom I get the chance ; after the next valse we can go out.”

Why did she refuse ? Why is there such a terrible fatality about some trifling word or act, which is so insignificant in itself, that it gives us not a thought. Falkner came up to her as she spoke. She had evidently seen him coming.

“ Now, Miss St. George ! ” he said, and the rest of his sentence was muttered low enough only to be heard by Ada. She glanced towards Kingsley, and blushed.

So she is going to dance with that contemptible cur, thought Kingsley, a fast dance too, and after my warning !

“ You have not spoken a word to me to-night,” said Mrs. Bruton, coming up to him in her admirably cool, well-mannered way.

He was not at a loss for a reply.

"You have been so surrounded; approach was impossible."

"Now that your partner has gone off," Kate said significantly, "you can give me your arm round the room, and we can look at the celebrities."

What a woman! Good Lord deliver me from such! This was Kingsley's mental comment. Aloud he said,

"With great pleasure. We may criticise, I suppose?"

"I shall certainly. I do not lay any claim to the virtue of not saying what I think;" (charming frankness).

"How well your friend Miss St. George dances?" observed Kingsley.

He thought this was great diplomacy on his part. He would show that this was not a subject he was at all afraid to touch on, and he was under the impression that he could mislead Mrs. Bruton!

"Yes, poor child, and she enjoys it so much." Here followed a sigh.

"Is that a thing to regret? I did not think you belonged to the class that looks on the pomps and vanities as iniquity!"

"Not I; you do not misjudge me, but I am thinking how strange it is that Ada should be dancing, and looking so happy, while her father is dying."

"Dying!"

"Yes; did you not know it? The awful contrasts that there are in life shock one and make one think, though I confess I am not much given to that sort of thing."

"I trust that Colonel St. George is not really so ill as you imagine."

“There is no doubt about it. I think Ada must know it herself; that is what seems so strange, but I suppose she does not quite realise it. It cannot be heartlessness; you don't think it can be?”

This, with an accent of much hope for a negative reply. Kingsley shrugged his shoulders.

“How can I tell? I am only an ignorant bachelor, and know nothing of the feminine character except that it is very charming.”

“No, it cannot be heartlessness.” (This affirmation left much room for doubt on the subject.) “Surely she must love her father, the only near relation she has in the world.”

“He will be a dreadful loss to her,” Kingsley said thoughtfully.

“Yes; but she will be rich and independent, and can choose her own life. It is a pity she is so young.”

“Ah! Mrs. Bruton,” interrupted one of her officer friends, “I have been looking for you everywhere. This is our dance.”

So with a nod and smile Kate left Kingsley. She had employed her time well, and had done quite as much mischief as could be expected.

Kingsley began to think a ball-room a more odious place than he had ever thought it. He turned to go. Ada had evidently forgotten her promise. If he were anything to her, would she rush off with other men and find greater pleasure in a senseless whirling round in their arms than in a quiet talk with him? *He* had come there only for her; *he* had not danced with any other woman. This, in Kingsley's mind, was a perfectly just comparison, he being conveniently forgetful that this “senseless whirling” was no pleasure to him. After a

few minutes he changed his intention of going away, and thought he would wait a little, and speak to Ada again.

As Kingsley stood there listlessly, he heard voices behind him, and glancing carelessly over his shoulder saw Falkner and Hamilton.

"I have had enough of this sort of thing," the former said with a yawn. "Let us go and try our luck."

"What a discontented fellow you are, Falkner," his friend said; "you have kept the heiress to yourself all the evening. I am out of the running altogether."

"You mean The St. George? She is a devilish pretty girl, but I have not danced much with her."

"The night is young yet. Three dances is pretty well, to say nothing of that walk under the trees."

Kingsley gave a slight start and strained his attention to catch every word. Why should he not? They were speaking of a girl whom he meant to ask to be his wife. He had a right to give them the lie if their words justified it, or he had a right, for his own sake, to know what they said, if it were true. But he scarcely argued so fully with himself; he yielded to his impulse and listened.

"It is permitted," Hamilton continued, "to put your arm round a girl's waist when you are waltzing with her, but I did not know it was customary to continue the position in a garden, *when any one is looking on!*"

"And what the devil brought you there?"

"I was smoking; a very innocent recreation."

A slight self-satisfied smile rested on Falkner's lips, which to Kingsley was more confirmatory of Hamilton's accusation than any words could have been.

"She is a nice little girl," Falkner said presently,

“and in this dull place she is a great help to the killing of time. She takes everything one says *au pied de la lettre*, and receives one's demonstration with delightful faith. She will know better next time!”

While Falkner said all this in his usual languid careless manner, he was mentally congratulating himself on Hamilton's stupidity, and thinking it uncommonly lucky that the dim light in the garden had made it possible for a woman totally unlike Ada St. George to be mistaken for her.

“By the way,” Hamilton said, “you have a formidable rival in that fellow Kingsley. He is always hanging after Miss St. George.”

“Don't alarm yourself,” said Falkner, “I am not at all afraid of him. You know deuced little about women if you have not learnt that the humble, sentimental, worshipping dodge don't pay; it bores them. Amuse them, my dear fellow, and above all things be sure of success, which I am in this instance.”

“Let's go now,” he added. “Which shall it be, roulette or rouge-et-noir?”

They strolled away together.

For an instant Kingsley entertained the wild idea of rushing after them and knocking them both down! He did not carry it out. What did he know of Ada? How could he give them the lie? Perhaps it was only the truth. Wretched curs; they were only true to their nature! Had he not heard scores of fellows talk in the same way; and women generally gave them cause enough for it.

Ada came towards him now, and all the hardness and cruelty in his nature rushed to his eyes and lips. Why should she look so childishly sweet and innocent? He

remembered her dignity the evening he had tried to flirt with her. All hypocrisy! Why should women be such living lies, when they are scarcely more than children? Men are supposed not to be over-scrupulous or good, and so are treated with a distrust which perhaps they deserve; but women, with their sweet ways and gentle looks, are simply wolves in sheep's clothing! He did not stop to think whether this which he had heard was all true; whether the evidence of two men whom he despised was worth crediting; but—swift as the blow which made his brother Geoffrey a murderer, was his decision, when he overheard these words; perhaps as fatal in its result though no hand was uplifted, and he stood innocent in the sight of men.

Ada was quite close to Kingsley now, and was stopping to make a remark; he did not give her time.

“Good-night, Miss St. George,” he said, “and good-bye. I leave Homburg in the morning. I hope you have enjoyed yourself *very* much.”

Poor child, she looked dazed; she gave him her hand mechanically, and did not seem to understand him. As he turned to go she took a step forward as if to speak to him in her eager impulsive way, then stopped herself, blushed, and looked puzzled and helpless. Kingsley did not see it; he did not look back once, but walked away with unswerving purpose. He had found her out in time, and he congratulated himself formally, but his congratulations gave him no joy. The world seemed much colder and uglier now. As he walked away from the Kursaal the sound of the music in the distance seemed to mock him. He was angry with himself, angry with Ada. Though he walked quickly and seemed to strengthen his resolve by a vigorous step, there was a hidden pos-

sibility in his mind of reversing—for his own sake—his decision to leave Homburg, but this possibility he refused to recognise. He would go, and there was a keen feeling of pleasure at the thought that his absence might give her pain. She would learn that he saw her frivolity and was not to be duped. Her very cleverness made her the more dangerous, because she could adapt herself to the style of any man she met; she could be grave and appear to have deep intellectual desires; she could chatter to the veriest fools, and her eyes would brighten and flash at their insolent compliments! He would try and banish her from his thoughts; after all, she had given him many a pleasant hour; he would try and think her not wicked but foolish. Poor girl! he would pity, not condemn her; he was too much the man of the world to be really distressed because she was not quite what he had fancied and hoped.

Alone, always alone, each individual soul that struggles through life, manfully or shrinkingly,—alone to the end. You think you are understood, and in moments of intense feeling you are not choice as to your words; what does it matter, surely they must know, but they don't, and the words, transparent as you think them, are not looked through, but taken in their outsideness, and you must be content, nor think that any further explanation will give clearness. It is a hard thing to accept, and we take a long time to learn it, but the sad knowledge comes at last.

Speech, what is it? You are a fool if you think that any words, be you ever so gifted with expression, will convey a tittle of the feeling that lies at the root of it all; on the contrary, they will have something subtly

rolled up in them, which was never in you, but got life somehow between the sound and the listener.

How little we provide against the day of waking! Can we never compass the fact that our own mind is the birth-place of all joy and woe, of all ugliness and beauty (which are but other names for the same things); that they go forth from thence and face us in material forms, and we know not that they are our offspring, fashioned though they have been by every hour of our mental life. Can we never reconcile ourselves to stand apart and let our joys be derivable straight from within, and not from outside? And what would that mean? A cold intellectual life at best, with some kindly feeling and readiness to be helpful in the world, but no glowing enthusiasm, no generous impulse, no noble passion.

CHAPTER XX.

“A LITTLE SINCE AND I WAS GLAD.”

FOR Ada a day of agonising anxiety and dread followed the ball. Frantically she called in every doctor within reach, and then the conviction stole into her heart that it was of no use. The day and night crept by, and neither earthly help nor her despairing cry for heavenly aid availed. Colonel St. George's feeble hold of life had suddenly relaxed; no long time was given to Ada to prepare for the coming parting; almost before she could realise that he was going from her she was face to face with death. They led her away from him when he had given her his last look, and now, scarce thirty hours since she had been, with a light heart, dancing in the Kursaal ball-room, she was utterly alone in the darkness of a first sorrow.

She sat in their little room, which seemed all changed now; her hands folded, no expression on her still features. It was a dull grey morning; within there was silence, without, the sound of church bells.

What was the good of church? What was the good of prayer? Would God make her father live again, her darling daddy, the only one in the wide world that loved her? How weak to weep and pray, and try to prop up her breaking heart by texts of scripture.

Pooh! after all her heart was not breaking a bit, it

was too hard for that. At least she would not be a coward, she would look the truth in the face. She had stayed away from him for her own paltry pleasures, and now she was trying to imagine that she was broken-hearted! She really was utterly heartless. She did not feel anything; she did not even cry as all feeling women do; she did not care to be with him when he was ill, dying, and now she need not be with him any more. That was all the difference. Oh! but he was not dead, why think so? What had happened last night? He could not look like that to-day; she would go and see him.

She got up suddenly and went to his door. Then all the ghastly stories of death and the dead, told to her in her childhood, came into her mind and she stood irresolute, but only for a moment.

What, she who had never feared anything, afraid of her dear old dad! Afraid to see the face that she had caressed so often!

She went in—he lay at rest. So still, so painless, the tenantless dwelling-place already losing the stamp of its inhabitant. She stood in health, in youth, in beauty; in the presence of death, and she realised existence bitterly and cruelly.

A few years of childish ignorance and happiness, then a living pain, and finally the cold quiet she looked at now. No tears yet! Was she not right in thinking herself heartless? No womanly emotion, only her hands pressed close upon her breast, and the words, "Oh! my God, my God," coming faintly through her parched lips.

Ada went upstairs and walked her room from end to end, over and over again unceasingly, as though she could

tread down the sorrow that clutched her. By-and-by, the servant, a Swiss girl, knocked timidly.

“Il y a un monsieur au salon pour mademoiselle.”

“Je n’y suis pas,” Ada said abruptly, turning her head away.

“Mais, mademoiselle, il veut absolument vous voir.”

The colour flashed into her cheeks.

“Eh bien, dites lui que je descends tout à l’heure.”

Was it possible that Kingsley had come back! Had he heard of her grief, and had he come, knowing that he only could do any good? The numbness of her misery seemed to pass away at the thought, and the tears sprang to her eyes. She went down with a choking in her throat, and as she opened the door her impulse, poor child, was to sob her grief out in his arms; but it was not Kingsley whom she saw.

In the most comfortable chair in the room sat Mr. Rivers, the clergyman, then doing duty at Homburg—an expression of sleek contentment on his face. Ada had seen him before. He rose as she entered and elongated his face a little. He took her hand and began leading her to a chair, as if he feared she could not walk straight because she had lost her father! Ada drew her hand away and stood still.

“Having heard,” he began, “of the sad affliction with which it has pleased God to visit you—”

“I desired the servant to say I did not wish to see any one.”

“But I, as the minister of God, insisted on seeing you. This is my duty.”

“What good can you do me?” she broke in impatiently.

"I can remind you that blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

"I know the Bible says so."

She remained standing and her face seemed set, and indifferent.

"But, my dear young lady," he went on in a tone quite devoid of all real feeling, "you must try and grasp the rich promises of the gospel, and believe that all is for the best. This life is but a vale of tears, and we must endure with patience those trials which come to us on our journey to the heavenly Jerusalem."

His voice had now reached that tone, which he imagined was peculiarly expressive of sympathy and comfort, so he went on with much satisfaction to himself,—

"A little while, and we shall lay aside this earthly tabernacle, and be clad in immortality, and sing an endless song of praise, then we shall see—"

He was going on most complacently when Ada, who all this time had been looking away from him, seemed suddenly to become conscious of his presence.

"Excuse me, Mr. Rivers, you, I daresay, mean to be very kind, but I am not listening to you. I only waste your time. The greatest kindness you can do me is to leave me alone."

He looked utterly astonished; his face lost its appearance of sleek complacency; he took up his hat and turned to go.

"I certainly shall not intrude on you again. I am grieved, deeply grieved, Miss St. George, that you receive the Lord's chastisement in such a spirit, and I trust he will see fit to soften your heart."

With this speech he departed.

Poor Ada! She called the servant, and said angrily,—

“Marie, je ne verrai personne, entendez vous bien, personne. Ne me donnez pas la peine de le dire deux fois.”

Then as if the only safe refuge would be beside her father, she went into his room, and there fully realised her utter loneliness.

If one word of loving sympathy had been spoken to her, instead of long sentences which had been said over and over again till all the meaning was worn out of them, life might not have looked quite so black. She was too brave to weep, to wring her hands, and thrust her sorrow on any one she could find; in the hope that some of it might thus be borne away. She grew stern and cold; all her youth and childishness seemed suddenly to have passed swiftly away, and from her dead father's room she looked out on the future in the calm, contemptuous way that men look at life, who have seen the world's deception and heartlessness.

Mr. Rivers, scarcely able to realise the fact that his eloquence and the dignity of his profession had been entirely without effect, went hurriedly downstairs, and not many steps from the door met Kingsley.

The latter had not left Homburg. He had heard just as he was starting of the death of Colonel St. George, and scarcely knowing why he did so, had put off his departure. This morning he took courage to call. He understood Ada's loneliness, and in spite of all, could not go away without seeing her.

“Poor child,” he muttered, “poor child!”

He stopped involuntarily as he met Mr. Rivers on the little path leading to the house. Mr. Rivers spoke first.

"Oh! you are going to inquire for Miss St. George, I presume?"

Kingsley nodded.

"I am grieved to say she is quite indifferent, quite hardened; I never saw any one so utterly devoid of all feeling. She would not listen to anything I said. In fact," he added, with considerable asperity, "she almost requested me to leave the house."

If Kingsley had spoken his thoughts, he would have said, "I am not surprised." He, however, said nothing; but made a step forward as if to pass on, but Mr. Rivers was not yet willing to let him go.

"It was in vain," he continued, "that I tried to lead her thoughts to Him who chasteneth not in wrath. It is very sad, so young and so heartless."

Kingsley could stand it no longer; he hated this man's canting face at all times, but this was too much.

"Pardon me, Mr. Rivers, but I am in a hurry. Good-morning," and he escaped.

"Can I see Miss St. George?" Kingsley asked the servant.

"Elle ne voit personne, monsieur," she answered stolidly.

"Will you take up my card to her?"

On it he had written faintly, "Will you see me, Ada?"

The girl turned it over and over in her hand.

"It is no use," she said, "she won't see you."

"Go and ask her," he said angrily.

So she went unwillingly, communing with herself as she ascended the stairs. "Elle sera si contrariée, j'ai peur. C'est vrai c'est un beau garçon, mais—"

She went to Ada's room; she was not there. Then she stood outside Colonel St. George's door. "Mon Dieu, je

n'y entrerais pas." Then an idea seemed to occur to her, and she went downstairs to Kingsley who was waiting impatiently.

"Tenez, monsieur," she said, giving him his card. "C'est comme j'ai dit, mademoiselle ne veut pas voir monsieur. Marie, elle disait, je vous ai dit mille fois que je ne verrai personne. C'est ennuyeux pour monsieur, mais meilleure chance une autre fois."

Kingsley turned away with a shrug of his shoulders. Just as well, thought he; I dare say I should have made a fool of myself if I had seen her in trouble, and she does not care for me. Untruthful like the rest, she thinks I shall remain here, and so she goes through the formality of not seeing me because her father is dead. She thinks I shall appreciate that false respect, or, what is more likely, she does not care a straw about me, and is glad of the chance of avoiding me. Perhaps—and he looked savage as he thought of it—she is not so unwilling to see that fellow Falkner. He looked down at the card which he still held—and the words on it caught his eye. "Will you see me, Ada?" What a fool he had been! Why he had almost forgotten the night of the ball, and now that she was in trouble was ready to believe in her again, and she had even sent him back his card! She meant him to understand that it was an impertinence to write to her in that way. A look of the utmost scorn came into his face as he thought.

How characteristic of the whole sex! One day they listen with loving looks to any fond title that you choose to give them; the next, they are grandly dignified, and look at you with cold astonish-

ment, if you address them by their Christian names. Bah! nothing true about them; always acting a little *rôle* which their grandmothers have played before them.

So the coming train bore Kingsley away from Homburg with an extra bitterness of disbelief and scepticism as to truth and goodness.

CHAPTER XXI.

“THE BUBBLING BITTERNESS OF LIFE AND DEATH.”

AN hour after Kingsley left Homburg Mr. St. George arrived. Ada had scarcely left her father's room all day, but she went down when her uncle came. Her face did not express any gladness or affection as she held out her hand to him. He evidently considered it his duty to kiss her, and bent a little forward to do so, but as Ada made no responsive movement, he gave up the attempt.

“I came at once,” he said.

“Yes,” she answered.

“It must have been very trying for you to be all alone, but you have friends here, they have been with you probably?”

“No, I have no friends here.”

“I thought I heard something about a schoolfellow.”

“Yes, she is staying in Homburg.”

“But, uncle,” she added quickly, “you would like something to eat, shall I order your dinner?”

“Oh! do not give yourself any trouble.”

Ada rang the bell.

“You will dine with me?” he asked.

“No, thank you.”

Ada got up to leave the room.

“Is there anything more you want?” she asked.

“No, but shall I not see you again this evening?”

There are some things I should like to consult you about."

"Then, why not speak at once? I forgot," she added, "my—" There was an instant of scarcely perceptible hesitation. "My father gave me a letter for you; here it is."

She drew it from her pocket and gave it slowly; unwilling to part with it, though its words were not for her. The last words his hand had written; the feebly traced address—on which was spent some of his last strength—how the sight of it smote her with sharp pain!

She watched her uncle read it, and saw a vexed look cross his face.

"Poor William," he said as he folded it up, "poor fellow."

Then he sat silent and frowned a little as he thought.

"You said you wanted to speak to me, to consult me?"

"Yes, can you tell me the address of the English parson here?"

"His card is somewhere. Mr Rivers, Kisliiff-Strasse. I forget the number.

"I will not see him," she added impatiently.

"I do not ask you to do so; in such matters, my dear, you must consult your own feelings, I should not dream of dictating to you."

This was in a tone of much kindness and consideration.

"Then why—" she began.

"I must make arrangements for your father's funeral."

For a second she did not quite understand; she had not quite realised that he must be carried away and laid in the earth, and vividly it all came before her, and a cold chill ran through her young blood. She drew her breath quickly, and her uncle noticed it.

"I am sorry to pain you, but you asked the question."

Then Ada remembered the conversation that had passed some weeks before, between her father and herself.

"My father must not be buried here," she said quietly, but her eyes flashed, for she felt sure that the letter contained his wishes on the subject, and her uncle had purposely ignored it.

"Why?" he asked with the utmost astonishment.

"Some time ago he told me that it was his particular wish that he should be buried with mamma at Oaklands."

"My dear niece, that was only if he died in England."

"No, it was said when he began to fear that he would die here; it would have been an unnecessary request if he had been in England."

"It is natural that you should want to carry out your papa's wishes, but what does it signify after all? Let the tree lie where it falls. It must be indifferent to him now."

"I promised my father that it should be so, and as far as I can, I will keep my promise."

"You may lay your scruples at rest; I have the management of these things, and you have done your duty in telling me of your father's request."

This he said as if he thought it put an end to the discussion; but not so; it made Ada if possible more determined about it.

"You mean me to understand, I suppose, that I have no authority in the matter, and must not interfere?"

He did not answer, so she continued—

"I don't know legally what power I have, I suppose none, but I know that the wishes of those that are dead are generally respected, and I am sure I can appeal to some one or other to have them carried out."

Her uncle's thin lips were pressed tightly together. He did not speak for a minute, and when he did it was quite quietly.

"I am surprised, Ada, that you speak in such a way, and talk of making a public scandal about your father. My only desire was to do what is best, and talk it over quietly with you, but you have your mother's violent temper, and will not be reasonable."

He went on in a kind of smooth murmur, which was impossible to interrupt.

"The expenses of removing your father's body to the Cemetery at Oaklands will be considerable, and the journey extremely painful to you."

"I always understood that papa was not poor, surely his fortune is sufficient to do as he wished; and as for me, it would be much more painful to me, to feel that I had not done as he requested."

There was no doubt in Ada's mind that she would carry her point. Not only in her surroundings, but in herself, everything seemed changed. She had been accustomed to be guided in everything by her father, now she had only herself to rely on, and her nature answered to the call. All girlish hesitation and sweet dependency were gone. Utterly indifferent about everything of general interest, this one sad duty she felt a cold certainty of fulfilling, and this inward assurance made itself known. Mr. St. George saw it would be worse than useless to oppose his niece.

"Then to-morrow evening you will be prepared to start?"

"Certainly."

"I forgot your mourning, you will not have time to get it."

"I have a black dress, that will do till I reach home."

With a look of utter weariness on her young face, Ada left the room.

A card of inquiry was sent by Mrs. Bruton that afternoon, with a polite request that if Ada thought she could be of any use, she would send for her.

Kingsley would have been satisfied that Ada was no longer cherishing an affection for Kate if he could have read her thoughts at that moment. She saw Mrs. Bruton in her true light, and that delusion was gone with the rest. Never more did it seem possible to this poor girl in her bitterness to trust to the love of man or woman.

I wonder sometimes that the quiet overwhelming power that grief has over the young, does not crush their life out.

That night Ada realised what it was to be utterly alone. The passing voices, the burst of rollicking song from the lips of young Germans going home after a night of mirth, reminded her that others were not like her, that there were bright faces and glad hearts everywhere, but for her—no love, no joy ever again. She would not lie down, she dreaded sleeping, she did not want to forget, for there must be a return to consciousness and memory. Now at least it was a continuous pain whose power she knew, and could bear in her own fierce way, but the cessation of feeling, and then the renewed agony, how could she tell what that might be!

She packed her trunks and then walked up and down the room. She thought of Célestine le Fèvre, a girl at school who had lost her father—how she had cried bitterly and after a while had seemed just the same. Could she ever be the same again? Perhaps so if she wept

like other girls, but she was not loving and gentle like Celestine, and so she would always feel that stifling sensation, that numbness which was half anger and half despair.

The morning hours came, and Ada's head sank on the table near which she sat, and she slept. After some hours she grew cold and woke. For an instant there came a confused feeling that everything was not the same as when she fell asleep, but the first glance round, brought her back to reality. The open trunk, the disorder of the room, made her quickly remember where she was; and the contrast of the first day she arrived with this on which she was going away, presented itself to her in all its cruelty.

Grief for her father did not shut out from Ada the memory of Kingsley; his last words kept echoing drearily through her brain, "I hope you enjoyed yourself *very* much." Perhaps if he saw her now he would be satisfied! Because they had so loved, they were unforgiving in their thoughts of one another.

Late in the evening Mr. St. George and Ada left Homburg. The former was most polite to his niece; he even studied her feelings, and so arranged that she should arrive at the station after her father's coffin had been placed in the train.

It so happened that Mrs. Bruton and some of her friends were at the station at the same time, and she saw Ada from a distance. She scanned the slender black figure from head to foot, and then turned to one of her friends.

"Miss St. George might have paid her father the respect of wearing crape; not one particle on her dress!"

"Uncommonly pretty she looks in black," said Falkner,

raising his eye-glass, "I suppose she did not care much about the old fellow."

"Poor girl!" said Jack Vernon, "she looks awfully cut up, I wish a fellow could do anything for her."

"Suppose you try your hand at consolation," said Falkner, with a laugh.

The poor boy coloured and looked thoroughly uncomfortable, but answered with a fair attempt at dignity, "I should not say she would appreciate it; I have not got such confidence in my own powers."

The object of their conversation was in the train now and out of sight, so they strolled away and discussed her at length till some new topic of conversation cropped up.

A thick mist fell the day that Ada arrived at Oaklands. It was the end of September, and nature was dying sadly and peacefully, to wake up in Spring to new beauty and life; not so would her father wake with the coming year, thought Ada. The great oaks which overshadowed the avenue had stood there when her father was born, and their boughs waved over his corpse as it passed along. They would stand there when she was dead, and perhaps for many generations after, and as she thought of it life seemed but a changing of faces on the same scenes, with no hope for them here or hereafter.

The following day Colonel St. George was laid beside his wife. About the future Ada had not thought at all, till they returned from the cemetery, and she was summoned to hear her father's will read. With a certain dull curiosity she listened to her father's decision respecting her life. The technicalities of a will are too tiresome to repeat; the substance of it was this:—Henry St. George was appointed guardian to Ada, with sole and entire control of the property (with the exception of a

small annuity which came to her through her mother) till she was twenty-four years of age. If Ada married before this age, with the approval of her uncle, the property was at once to become hers, but otherwise she would have no control over it till she was twenty-four.

It was difficult for Ada to follow the peculiar phraseology of the will, as she was totally unaccustomed to that form of expression; consequently many of the details escaped her, but the one thing that remained firmly impressed on her mind was, that everything was in her uncle's power, and that for some years her life would be closely and painfully associated with him. It did not for an instant occur to her to feel indignant at this decision of her father's, or even to think it an unwise one. His presence was too pathetically close to her as yet for her to question any act of his. She simply felt it an unfortunate accident, which time would prove to be more or less bearable.

Ada realised that evening her uncle's position in the house. After dinner—a weary meal which recalled by its difference the days before she left home for Homburg—Mr. St. George detained Ada as she was going to slip off.

“I want to tell you my plans about the future, Ada. You don't feel in spirits no doubt to discuss anything,” he said, interrupting her as she was going to speak, “but it is just as well to make the effort.”

“Yes.”

“I mean to live here, You have no objection?”

Ada was thinking how different was the politeness of her uncle from that of her father; that of the former like an unbending and defensive armour, that of the latter like a yielding garment which beautified the wearer.

Such comparisons are fatal, instituted between one who is disliked and one who is loved.

"No," she answered; "I suppose it is the best place for us to stay."

"Your cousins will make it more cheerful for you."

This with an attempt at a hopeful and encouraging expression.

"Yes."

Answers in monosyllables are not pleasant, but Mr. St. George was not to be suppressed.

"I shall go up to town for Sylvia in a few days."

Ada felt quite glad; it did not promise well for their future comfort that she should so rejoice at his probable absence for a day.

"Had you not better come with me?" he said, "Have you thought about your mourning?"

"I need not go to town for that. I can give orders about it; everything can be sent."

"You would not like to come to town? The change would do you good."

"I am very well; why should you fancy I am ill? As to change I have had enough of that for a long time."

After a moment's reflection her uncle's remark seemed rather an inoffensive one to call forth such a snappish reply, so after a little silence Ada thought she would venture an amiable remark.

"And Sydney, where is he?"

She remembered opportunely the existence of her other cousin; neither of them had she seen.

"He is abroad with a tutor. He will be in England soon, I hope."

How big and silent the room seemed! How impossible to reconcile the brightness of the past years with

the utter blackness of those that were coming! The presence of Mr. St. George seemed to make the room all the drearier. Ada wanted to rid herself of this presence, and yet she was angry at her own unreasonableness. What had he done that she should dislike him so?

“You will manage the house, will you not?”

“If you like. I did so after I came back from school.”

“Well, you had better continue it. Sylvia is too delicate. Very good practice for you,” he added with a smile, that was intended to be playful.

A few suggestions about the household followed, which Ada felt to be commands, but she was little inclined to combat them, her sole desire being to bring the conversation to an end. To be left alone, that was all she wanted now.

CHAPTER XXII.

“AMONG THEM, BUT NOT OF THEM.”

WHY describe the listless days of grief and apathy that followed? With studied consideration Mr. St. George consulted Ada about everything—the trifling details of the household, of the farm, of the demesne. If he was desirous that his wishes alone should be carried out, he could not have adopted a better plan than applying to Ada at a time like this; of course, she agreed to anything that he suggested so that it cut short discussion. It would have been impossible for her to have differed from him; all details were utterly unimportant to her now; so that in the most natural way the management of everything fell into the hands of her uncle.

Ada was going bitterly over those days at Homburg—the hours she had given to Kingsley, the hours she had taken from her father. From the contemplation of both there seemed nothing but regret, unending regret which broke her spirit.

Why did they ever go to Homburg? Why did she ever meet Kingsley? It was cruel, horribly cruel, that he should have taken her every thought, filled her with a happiness which grew stronger and stronger every day—to end thus. She had robbed her father of the thought and attention he would have prized so much, and given it to Kingsley who valued it—how little!

Sometimes she felt a sudden pity for herself as for some one else who was desolate. Her own identity was almost forgotten. This was some poor girl left quite alone in the world, without a friend, to go on from day to day with a round of little duties, till she grew old and weary and dropped out of her place at last.

No sort of speculation as to the future came into those dark days; everything looked grey, dull, and indefinite.

Sometimes Ada walked to the cemetery where her father lay, and sat there for hours; hoping vaguely that her sorrow would take some softer form, that tender recollections might make her more sad and yet more hopeful. She would try there to remember his every look and word, and would tell herself that she had not been really neglectful, that he must have known she loved him more than any one, and it was only her childishness that made her run after pleasure. Still there was ever a gnawing sensation which closed round her heart and would not be thrust away, caused by the knowledge that she had been absorbed by her own joys while her father was dying, and she yearned, till it was a deep inarticulate cry, for his loving arms to be around her again, and his lips to say she was forgiven.

Mr. St. George went up to town for his daughter and stayed away for some days. The evening that they were expected back, Ada found herself watching for them with a dull curiosity.

What would this girl be like? It was hard to think that her Uncle Henry's child could have anything in common with her. She was an invalid, had a delicate back, from a fright or a fall, or something, and could not walk upstairs.

Sylvia's delicacy seemed to make it possible to Ada to

like her. Perhaps she could be of use to her, could do things for her, lessen her pain in some way, and thus prove to herself that she was not altogether bad and selfish, that it was momentary thoughtlessness which made her forgetful of her father. To him, she could never explain, never make up for the past dreary days he had spent, but perhaps in a pale, lifeless sort of way, kindness and attention to others might atone in some faint manner. Thus it was with far from unkindly thoughts in her heart, this lonely girl sat, in the dusk of an October evening, watching for her cousin's arrival.

The sound of carriage-wheels, a ring of the bell, then voices. They had arrived, but Ada did not go to meet them. Her uncle was there; she was in no hurry to see his face; he would misinterpret her welcome into warmth, into friendliness, into an acknowledgment and recognition of him as master, and think that her hostility towards him was at an end; besides, this cousin might not like her, might be cold and repelling. Already Ada was encasing herself in an armour of reserve, was curbing her frank, impulsive nature.

She heard a thin, peevish voice say,

"Give me your arm, papa, I am too weak to walk in alone."

Then the door, which had been ajar, was pushed open, and they came in. Ada got up from her seat by the window and came to speak to her cousin.

She saw a short, fair girl, with very arched eyebrows, so arched that they gave her face an expression of discomfort and pain, and in Sylvia St. George these eyebrows were what first attracted any one's attention. After looking a little longer you would notice that she had thin lips with a restless look about them, a thin

nose, and a white complexion without any tone in it, but you would always come back to the eyebrows as the main characteristic of the face.

"How do you do?" she said, holding out her hand to Ada, from whose touch it fell limply, "I am too tired to speak to any one."

Her father led her to the sofa, where she lay back, closed her eyes and sighed.

"Can you not take off Sylvia's cloak and bonnet?" said Mr. St. George to Ada.

She did so, and Sylvia submitted without a word, except that at the end she murmured,

"My gloves."

Ada drew them off, and her hands being immediately under observation she could not but remark them; small, white and incapable-looking hands that in general would be thought beautiful, and that in particular—by Sylvia herself—were considered somewhat more than beautiful!

Ada noticed too as she lay there that her figure seemed clumsy and too stout for the thin, sharp face.

"What a dreadful journey!" she said presently, opening her eyes and looking at Ada with an expression which meant, "What have I got to expect of you?"

"You are not strong, you must be very tired," said Ada gently.

She was trying to be kind and sympathetic, but the possibility of even liking Sylvia seemed already quite at an end. She was still swift in her conclusions.

"Can't I have some tea?" Sylvia asked, in a tone which sounded as if some one had said she could not have it.

"Certainly," said her father, stretching out his hand to the bell.

"Do you like sitting in the dark like this?" she asked Ada; "it would kill me."

"They will bring the lamp presently."

As she spoke the door opened and a flare of light fell on Ada's sad, quiet face. Sylvia again took a very comprehensive survey of her cousin.

"What a quiet, countrified place this is," she said, "not a stir as we drove up the avenue. Were you frightened when papa was away?"

"Not at all."

"You are not nervous like me, I suppose; I think it looks fearfully dreary."

Here the tea came in, and Sylvia moved as if to sit up, glancing at Ada in a way which said, "Put a pillow to my back, you see how feeble I am."

Ada did it, wondering at her and roused a little from the stillness of her grief by this new person, who would probably develop her character more and more. The first indications were not prepossessing.

After Sylvia had taken her tea, she lay back again on the sofa with closed eyes. Mr. St. George turned to Ada.

"Any one called since I left?"

"Yes, I think so; some of the neighbours, I forget whom."

"You did not see them?" he asked in a tone which meant "Pray why?"

"No," she answered carelessly, "I did not feel inclined."

She would not say to him that she was too sad to talk to acquaintances; that she dreaded intrusive condolences. It was an instinct to hide from her uncle anything like emotion.

"You must not neglect your friends; we owe a duty to society."

Ada made no reply to this. Mr. St. George stood with his back to the fire, his eyes on the ground. He had an air of being always absent-minded, and yet you could never feel sure that he had not noticed your faintest movement or gesture.

"You had better go to bed, Sylvia. Shall I carry you up?"

"Yes. Dr. Sutton said I must be careful not to fatigue myself."

"Will you go up and see if your cousin's room is ready?" Mr. St. George asked Ada.

She went at once. She did not mind trouble, was not at all disobliging by nature, but her uncle's requests sounded so like orders that she felt a child's inclination to rebel. She could not quite understand herself. Had she such ungrounded prejudice against her uncle and his family, that she disliked doing even a trivial kind office for him? When she came back she heard Mr. St. George saying to his daughter, "Yes, yes, make the exertion to-night."

He lifted her up as he spoke, and carried her upstairs. Ada holding a candle, and lighting them. When they reached Sylvia's room, Ada said good-night and was going away, when her cousin stopped her.

"Do you mind staying with me a little, and helping me to undress?"

"No, not if I can be of use to you."

"Then shut the door, and sit down."

The two girls were alone. Was this an overture of friendliness on Sylvia's part; what was it? Ada felt puzzled.

"You see," she said, "I am tired, and do not want a strange maid the first night. I prefer you, though you are quite a stranger. How funny it is that I have never seen you."

As she spoke, she let down her hair—colourless, dead-looking hair, but very long and thick. She combed it out slowly, and in an appreciative way.

"What a quantity of hair you have!" Ada said, feeling that she could not sit there and stare, without articulating.

"Yes, I have too much; it tires me."

"Am I at all like what you fancied I would be?" she added suddenly.

"I don't know."

"You don't know! What a strange girl you are! Just unlock my portmanteau, will you? and give me some things I want."

"Thank you!" she said as Ada gave her a dressing gown. "Well, *you* are not at all what *I* fancied. I thought you would be a bright-eyed, laughing girl, full of life and merriment, and you are thin and pale, and look a hundred years old! You are younger than me, are you not?"

"I am not eighteen."

"I am twenty-three, and I do not look that, though I have been such an invalid."

Ada thought she looked much older.

"But then," she went on, "you make such a dowdy of yourself. There is no necessity, because you are in mourning, that you should wear a plain long dress, like that you have on."

"I like it."

"They are wearing dresses now," Sylvia continued,

taking no notice of what Ada had said, "with a great deal of trimming; deep flounces and a sash at the back; it has a very good effect. Just lift up the tray in that trunk. Do you see a blue dress there?"

"Yes."

"Then lift it out, and give it a shake."

As Ada did so, Sylvia added,

"Do you see what I mean? Is it not pretty?"

The dress was a blue silk of such brilliancy of colour, that Ada's eyes blinked; much decked out, and not at all pretty. What was Ada to say!

"I dare say it would look very nice on you," she said at last, "but I like simpler things."

A true woman's solution of the difficulty!

"You are not likely to see it on me," Sylvia said peevishly. "It was so provoking, I had bought a lot of dresses just before we had to go into black."

"Why should you be in mourning?" Ada said quickly and angrily. "You scarcely knew papa; you did not care for him; it is only a mockery and a pretence."

"Dear, dear! what a funny notion! One does not put on mourning because one cares, it is only because it is the thing to do. What remarks people would make if I went out with you in colours; besides, does it not please your eye to see me in black?"

"Not in the least. I don't care."

"Help me into bed, will you? Gently—do not be in such a hurry. Thank you," she added as she lay down. "How ghostly the room looks! Candles do not half light up a place; I miss the gas of London."

"Good-night," said Ada, moving as if to go.

"Stay, you are not tired, are you?"

“Not particularly.”

“Well, sit down and talk a little. As we are going to live together for some years, we may as well begin by being friends.”

How that desirable result was to be brought about, by dragging out an inane conversation at this hour, Ada did not see clearly, but she checked her impatience. It certainly would not tend towards their better friendship, if she told Sylvia that she thought her a fool! She might be better than she seemed; it had already come to this forlorn hope!

“What do you do here all day?” Sylvia began.

“The same things as most girls in the country; I read and work; out of doors, I garden and ride.”

“How dull it must be! Have you many friends?”

“No, none at all.”

Sylvia looked blankly and sleepily at her, and the eyebrows seemed more arched and more discontented.

“Did you not make friends at school—abroad?”

“No.”

Ada felt herself changing colour, and felt too that it did not escape Sylvia’s notice. She was one of those women who would never betray at the time (out of delicacy, of course) that she observed any confusion on your part, but perhaps you would discover unpleasantly, long afterwards, that she had not been blind.

“You liked being abroad? It must have been fun.”

“I liked it part of the time.”

“You had a great deal of amusement, I believe; went to parties, went to see places, and all sorts of things like that, did you not?”

“Yes, we went about a good deal at first.”

It was not pleasant for Ada to be questioned about a time so full of sorrow for her.

“ You know I have never been abroad, never was so lucky as you ; perhaps we can go next summer, you can make papa go.”

“ I ! ”

“ You don't like papa, I see that plainly, but that is because you do not understand him ; he is very easily managed if you only know how to set about it.”

“ I don't want to manage my uncle, or any one.”

“ Every woman ought to have cleverness and tact, there is always something to be gained by management.”

“ You don't like the country ? ” Ada asked, changing the subject, which was disagreeable to her.

“ No ; what is there to like ? except in summer-time, in a house full of nice, lively people. Of course, you can ride and walk and amuse yourself ; you forget I am a wretched sufferer, and all through the winter I shall have nothing to do but lie here and think of my pains and aches—‘ Ah, mon Dieu ! ’ ”

Ada felt a little sorry for her, or thought she ought to feel sorry, I am not sure which—then said,

“ I think you ought to go to sleep now.”

“ I am so nervous ; give me some sal volatile ; you will find the bottle in my trunk. Could you not sit here till I go to sleep ? ” she asked as Ada gave it to her.

Her good-nature could not stretch itself so far as that. She was weary of talking to Sylvia, of even looking at her, and longed to be alone.

“ I am tired,” she said, “ you must excuse me ; there is nothing to frighten you ; if you are nervous alone, you can ask Celestine to sleep in your room to-morrow.”

“ Well, I suppose it was too much to ask. Good-night.”

She turned her head as if she expected Ada to kiss her, but Ada did not care for the indiscriminate use of that form of salutation, and merely touched her limp hand, and went away with the polite hope that she would sleep well. Thus ended the first evening with her new companion. Ada saw that from her, there was no hope of pleasure; she saw too that she must even be chary of kindly words and actions to her, for they would first be accepted as a matter of course, then claimed as a right, and finally they would lose all beauty, and be given and received with a bad grace; better to withhold them altogether and isolate herself entirely, than let this new element intrude itself into her life, and poison its calm. Better let herself be thought at once cold and unsympathetic, than yield at first to Sylvia's whims and exactions, till driven to the paltry resource of retort and recrimination.

Thus thought Ada before she fell asleep, and next morning she put her resolutions into practice. Sylvia was surprised to find that the gentle, obliging girl of the previous night, was not to be driven about at her will. When asked to do anything for Sylvia, which would have occupied much time, and kept her near to listen to her inane chatter, Ada would say, "I am very busy, I will send Celestine," or "excuse me, I always read alone at this hour."

Ada thus firmly shut out Sylvia from penetrating deep into her life. She felt that her life would be broken up into unmeaning fragments in such companionship. She found herself leading a less listless existence, as though this new arrival had taught her more self-dependence. To have truly this occupation that she talked of, she arranged her day somewhat, giving

many hours to reading. She even recommenced riding, an amusement which a few days ago she had thought it impossible to resume, because of its happy past associations. Not altogether unproductive of good had been the advent of this girl, with the discontented eyebrows and empty mind.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“THRIFT IS BLESSING IF MEN STEAL IT NOT.”

“THE King was in his parlour counting out his money”; not in tangible coin in this case, but in figures. Not a very kingly man either was Mr. St. George as he sat in the library at this ennobling occupation. The table was thick with papers of various tints, but all suggesting a dreariness in which some minds revel and delight. Mr. St. George was not pleasant to look at in the seclusion of his business-room; perhaps nothing more than a hard practical man, but one would be inclined to think—looking at his cold, keen eyes and thin twitching lips—that the hardness and practicality had been shrivelled into something narrower; into meanness and a tight avariciousness, and that the grey eyes were ever watching for opportunities and turning them to account.

Perhaps we are doing an injustice to Mr. St. George. “Born a younger son,” thought he, “what a miserable struggling existence I have led! while this fellow William has had everything he could wish for; well, it is my turn now, I must make the best of my time.”

He continued a calculation on a slip of paper, for some time, then opened his desk and took a letter from the secret drawer. “Let us see,” he said, opening it. He gave a little occasional toss of his head as he read it:

“Dear Henry,—I have not seen much of you for many years, but I have every reason to believe you an honour-

able and trustworthy man. In proof thereof I appoint you my sole executor and trustee; and what is far more important, I make you the guardian of my daughter, Ada. I think a girl of her age quite unfitted to have the control of a large property, and wish you to take the place of a father to her until she is twenty-three years of age, when, according to my will, she shall be her own mistress. I should not wish Ada to marry before that age unless with your full approval and consent. It will be best that you should live at Oaklands and have your own children there also; they will be nice companions for Ada and make her life brighter. In conclusion, I commend my child to your care; begging you to treat her with love and consideration, and not to oppose her in any of her wishes unless they be utterly imprudent. Lay my body by my wife in the cemetery at Oaklands.

“Your affectionate brother, WILLIAM.”

The letter was folded into a long slip, a note made on the summit of it, and it was restored to its previous place of concealment. Then Mr. St. George leaned back in his chair and thrust his hands in his pockets.

“I’ll not oppose her wishes,” he muttered, “unless they run counter to mine; in which case I have no idea of giving in to a brat of a girl like that. I shall do my duty to her as guardian, and my duty is not to let her rule me. It is unlucky that she does not like me; a man works under disadvantages when there is a senseless prejudice against him, but, by Jove! I don’t much care. William has given everything to my care—about the most sensible thing he ever did, poor fellow—and I mean to act according to my own judgment in all things. I don’t see,” he mused, “what interference I have to fear. Ada knows nothing of business—Sylvia could buy and sell her in

worldly matters. Unless any one puts it into Ada's head to question my acts, she is not the least likely to institute any inquiry. Five years; it is a very short time; one cannot do much in five years. William of course intended that in my position as guardian and trustee I should repay myself for all my trouble. He might have left a legacy to Sydney; the boy will want money now. He could spend it better," thought he with a flash of pride, "than that moping girl. I'll send him to Oxford; I think I can manage it if I keep a tight hand on him. Two thousand a year to keep up the house and place—it's little enough, but I'll do it on half; I have been too many years living from hand to mouth not to know the value of a sovereign! That man Danvers will be here presently, I wonder will he be satisfactory?"

Mr. St. George drew himself up from his contemplative attitude, and employed himself putting all the papers to rights. Accounts, leases, inventories, there was a goodly mass of them. He had been about an hour at this work when the expected Mr. Danvers appeared.

"Be kind enough to be seated," Mr. St. George said severely.

Mr. Danvers was kind enough to do so, putting his hat down carefully on the brim, and taking from his pocket a pair of spectacles which he began to polish diligently.

"I called at your office in town, Mr. Danvers," Mr. St. George continued, "but as I could not see you, I thought it would be more satisfactory if you came down to me."

"Ah! yes, I was with a client of mine, Lord Audley of Southton."

"You understand, Mr. Danvers, the sort of man I wish to entrust with my affairs? A man in whom I can place the strictest confidence; who will carry out my views thoroughly and discreetly.

Here Mr. Danvers put on his spectacles with an air of considering the matter settled, and said,

“Yes sir, a man in fact who will see things as you mean them to be seen and will have no obstinate and unmeaning prejudices of his own.”

“Precisely. The present agent is a man whom it would be impossible to induce to take a new view of anything; now, as I wish to make several changes, that would not suit me.”

“Certainly not, sir.”

“Therefore I dismiss him.”

“Quite right, sir.”

“We shall go over a part of the estate after lunch. There are several tenants whose holdings have very considerably increased in value; and I think it but right that their rents should be proportionably increased according as opportunities occur for so doing. I shall require you to keep two distinct sets of accounts; one set showing the receipts and expenditure as things now are; another, showing the receipts and expenditure under the changes which I shall make.”

“Do you understand?” he added sharply, for Mr. Danvers seemed to have rather a leaden expression of countenance.

“Yes, yes, sir, perfectly. The double set of accounts being specially for your own personal satisfaction.”

Here he lowered his spectacles and looked over them at Mr. St. George, and somehow the look conveyed to his employer that he was perfectly understood.

“I shall also take you to see your house at Dullstoke, at present occupied by Mr. Sandys. I forget whether you have a wife and family?”

“Not a wife, sir, but two daughters.”

“They will live with you?”

“Yes, Mr. St. George,”

“I am a man who looks sharply after his own affairs, you will find that out when we do business together.”

“Quite right, sir.”

“I think it my duty, particularly in the very responsible position of guardian and trustee.” He got up as he spoke, and began putting away some of the papers.

“You will put some order amongst all this, Mr. Danvers, when you have settled down to work. There are a great many leases I want you to look into.”

“Now,” he added, shutting his escritoire with a click and locking it, “we shall come to luncheon, and I shall introduce you to my ward, and also to my daughter.”

Mr. Danvers took his hat up, put his spectacles in his pocket—they had an exclusively business connection—and followed his patron into the dining-room. He that ran could read Mr. Danvers’ profession; it was as plain as if he were stamped all over, attorney—attorney—attorney. You expected to see parchment sticking out of all his pockets. A close shaven face, out of which no amount of washing could extract the grease; broad shoulders, the head a little in advance, as if a good part of his life had been spent in prying into secret affairs, and a kind of catch-a-weasel asleep expression in his eyes.

Ada was rather astonished at this apparition in the dining-room. Sylvia had known that he was coming. Mr. Danvers was not quite at ease at luncheon; held his knife and fork hopelessly, and seemed desirous of helping every one to everything, as if on him depended the duties of host. Sylvia was very sweet to him; so much so that he hazarded a compliment of a musty nature, which Sylvia received graciously. He made

several attempts to draw Ada into conversation, but though she was polite and moderately talkative, the conversation with her seemed to stop and then begin again as if for the first time, and so they never got beyond the preliminaries.

After lunch, when Mr. Danvers had once more seized his hat, Mr. St. George said to Ada,

“I am going to drive Mr. Danvers over part of the estate, he is going to undertake our agency. Would you like to come with us, Ada? You ought to understand these things a little.”

Several hours of her uncle's and Mr. Danvers' society, —no, that was not to be tolerated.

Mr. St. George knew what her reply would be, therefore his suggestion was well timed.

“No, thank you; I am going to have a ride.”

Mr. St. George and Mr. Danvers spent a most satisfactory afternoon together. They both came back looking infinitely pleased with one another, and parted on the best of terms. Some of the small farmers they had visited—simple men without many thoughts beyond their daily work—shook their heads gravely, after the appearance of Mr. Danvers, and expressed it as their opinion that “they did not like none of them changes, no good ever came of change”; which opinion they were much confirmed in later on.

Some rather hot discussion there was, on the home-ward drive, between Mr. St. George and his new agent, as to the money value of the latter's services. Mr. Danvers was reminded of several little events in his past history with which Mr. St. George was strangely *au fait*, and these unfortunate little events, he argued, were likely to damage Mr. Danvers' character, in the eyes of

any man of less discernment than himself. It was very forcibly put to Mr. Danvers, that he ought to recognise on which side his bread was buttered. He refused to recognise it at first, and suggested—always in a respectful and business-like way, and with his spectacles on—that it was not every professional man who would be willing to accept the difficult and responsible post offered, and that Mr. St. George must not forget the extra labour of the double account arrangement.

Very loftily Mr. St. George said, there was no responsibility beyond what any agent would be glad to accept, and that if Mr. Danvers showed himself zealous, so as to meet with his approval, he would, on Miss St. George coming in for the property, explain matters to her, and show her that she could not do better than keep Mr. Danvers as her agent and confidential man of business, for the rest of his days.

This fascinating picture of the future made Mr. Danvers, after due consideration, recognise on which side his bread was buttered. Terms were agreed upon, and the quarrel of these two was but the renewal of their love!

This evening Mr. St. George was more than usually cheerful. He had somewhat the air of a great man, relaxing his mind after arduous mental labour! He rallied Ada on her silence and asked her to sing. She was about to deny being able to do so, when he said, "I have seen a number of songs here, they can only belong to you."

"I only sing a little, and I am out of practice."

How could she sing to them, and awaken all her sad recollections in such uncongenial company? Each little song had some association; and in singing, each separate thought and act connected with them would look her in

the face. Impossible to have courage enough to bear the presence of such ghosts.

"I have not heard you play for a long time, Sylvia; come, enliven us a little," said her father.

Sylvia got up languidly, took off her bracelets slowly, and gave them to Ada. "I am not so disobliging," she said with a look semi-playful, semi-sneering.

She played from memory a most elaborate modern piece. It was played with great skill, and was faultless in time and execution; but Ada thought that Kingsley would have called it an agonising performance. This was Sylvia's sole accomplishment, and one on which she prided herself not a little.

"Bravo," said her father, "another Liszt!"

She turned slightly towards Ada as if expecting some remark.

"You have wonderful fingers, how well you play!" Ada said; "but I do not like the piece."

"Oh! I suppose you like dreadful classical music, without a beginning or end; no melody in it, and always a Church voluntary effect about it! All very well now and then, but this is the sort of music that tells in society."

"But to play to oneself, and to a few people who really care for music, don't you like classical music best?"

"To play what will please the majority and what will show off one's playing, is the great point."

"Here," she added with a pout, "buried in the country it does not much matter whether one has accomplishments or not."

"Oh! we have very good society here, have we not, Ada?" said Mr. St. George. "There are a great many highly respectable county families within a radius of twenty miles, are there not?"

He spoke cheerfully in a congratulatory tone, as if every one must see that everything was most satisfactory. Before Ada could answer, Sylvia said pettishly—

“How tiresome you are, papa! what do you know about the county families, you have not lived here? Stupid people, I suppose, who are dressed in the fashions of a year back, and think themselves infinitely important.”

“It is not unlike them, I must say,” Ada said.

“There you see, even Ada says so, and she is quiet and dowdy enough, goodness knows!”

“You are not complimentary to your cousin. I think she is very nicely dressed. Let us see,” said Mr. St. George, coming near her. “Very neat and simple.”

He looked at her as if he thought she must feel an instant elation of spirits at his praise. Decidedly Mr. St. George was talkative and affable to-night.

“And Sydney?” said Sylvia, when she had gone back to the sofa, and was sipping her tea, the hand which held the cup in an admirable position to be observed. “When is he coming?”

“Next week,” answered her father, “about Thursday, I fancy.”

“He must be quite a young man now,” he added after a moment’s silence; “we have not seen him for six months.”

“He is not eighteen yet; quite a child. Does he come alone?”

“Alone? of course.”

“I thought he might bring one of his friends.”

“We cannot entertain at present. It would not be at all becoming to receive company while we are in such deep mourning.”

He gave a quick glance at Ada. Surely this sentiment would meet with her approval! She put down her work with a quick impatient movement and a slight frown, and went out of the room. She went swiftly through the hall and passages as if to escape something that followed, and up to her own room.

The night was chilly and the sky a cold blue. She looked out on the stars. Truly all warmth and tenderness had gone out of her life, and all was as bleak and pitiless as nature looked that night. Her uncle and Sylvia seemed like some dreadful weight, which was to hang round her neck for years.

“What shall I have grown like,” she thought, “by the time I am twenty-three? Perhaps like them. Having given my thoughts no tongue for all those years, and having to yield to a certain extent to the people I live with, my own nature will be lost or buried.”

The wind, the sky, the innumerable sharp stars, brought no brighter thought to the poor child. All the love of her deep, tender nature had been given to her father and to Kingsley. They had both gone; one into the unknown future, carrying her love with him and cherishing it there as here—the other into the busy world casting her love away from him, as a thing of little worth. Youth is sanguine they say, full of rainbow hues, but there was no bow in the cloud for Ada.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A GODLY YOUTH.

MR. ST. GEORGE and Sylvia had gone out to drive. It was the first time since the latter's arrival that Ada had been quite free from their presence at Oaklands. It was with intense pleasure she had seen them drive away; knowing that she would have some hours solitude as they had gone to return some visits at a considerable distance. To feel that she could look round without seeing those painfully arched eyebrows; that she could go all over the house without encountering her uncle suddenly round a corner, was indeed a treat to Ada. She could be herself--unrestrained in expression and action. To-morrow, Sydney was expected, but she did not look forward to his coming with the faintest speculation. She had nothing to expect from that family; Sydney would be an addition more or less disagreeable, but reserve was becoming so habitual to her, that to exclude one more person from her life and be disliked by him, would not make much difference.

Ada opened the piano and began to sing to herself all the old familiar songs. It was nearly three months since she had come back from Homburg; it seemed more like three years. If she could divide the day into fixed parts, appointing so many hours for reading, so many for working, so many for riding or walking, perhaps the time

would pass quicker. She had heard that an existence entirely monotonous and regular, glided by rapidly. This plan of marking off the hours was repulsive, but it would become perhaps like the continued burr of a machine,—painful at first, but lulling in its effect afterwards. But supposing the time did go by rapidly, what was the good of that? What would it lead to? Years might free her from the presence of her uncle and cousin; they would not bring her friends or any love to brighten her life.

She began to sing again, a sad little French song, every verse of which ended with a note that sounded like a pitiful cry.

It was the beginning of November, and the cold wind was taking up the few last withered leaves and tossing them about scornfully, as if mocking the dead summer and all its past joys. Ada sang on, thinking of Kingsley; of when his glance had softened—when she had read truth and tenderness in his eyes; thinking of how they might have deepened—thinking of the bleak present.

She was still singing when the door opened softly. She had not heard a fly drive up; had not heard any one enter. The intruder was a tall slender lad. There was a slight smile on his full red lips as he looked at Ada, and a boyish, mischievous glance in his blue eyes. If he had followed his inclinations he would have given Ada a start; thrown something at her or given a sudden shout; but his cousin was too new to him for such familiarity, so he stood undecided what to do. He was rather astonished and fascinated by this cousin; by her pale face and dreamy eyes; he had not time to notice more. What had possessed Sylvia to tell him that she was a rather plain, dull-looking girl?

Ada had got to the last verse of her song, and the final note sounded more dreary than any of the others. As she ended, she felt the presence of some one, and looked round with a start. She rose when she saw Sydney, uncertain for a moment who he was.

"You are my cousin, Ada, I suppose," he said, coming forward as he spoke, and holding out his hand.

She looked at him as she took it; he was a bright, pleasant faced English lad.

"You were not expected till to-morrow."

"No, but I make a rule of coming when I am not expected; it is more fun. Where is my father?"

"Out driving."

"And Sylvia?"

"Out also."

"All well, I suppose?"

"Yes."

He did not know what to say next, and perhaps would have been angry with Ada for not helping him a little—had it not been that he had heard that dreary little song, and that, from time to time, he was glancing at her sad face and black dress. They both sat down. Suddenly Sydney said,

"It must bore you horribly, having us all here."

It was the first time that Ada had been spoken to as if this were *her* home—her own possession. She had never thought of it before, but somehow the recognition of it sounded kind and pleasant from Sydney. She smiled as she looked at him, and seeing her face under this new aspect, Sydney again thought of his sister's senseless remark and wondered what she meant by it.

"I could not tell you so, could I?" Ada asked.

"Why not? It would be natural enough to wish us

at Jericho. I dare say Sylvia is not too amiable; she never was famous for it; and my father—well, I suppose he is well enough, but still it is not very pleasant to have to adopt a whole family. I know I should not like it.”

The smile died out of Ada's face, and Sydney felt uncomfortable; ruffled up his hair, coloured, and tried to look at his ease, but could not manage it. Ada was not accustomed to youths of this age; when they think much is expected of them, and that the public eye is to a fearful extent watchful of their demeanour! Ada understood soon and came to the rescue.

“You have been travelling about, have you not?” she said, starting a new subject.

“I was studying at Dresden, and then I went to Switzerland with the fellow who had been cramming me.”

“Did you like it?”

“I should think I did,” he said enthusiastically; “those splendid big mountains, you can't have an idea how beautiful they are!”

“You went on wonderful expeditions I suppose, and carved the names of the places on a stick and felt a great traveller!”

“Come, that is not fair to laugh at me; it really was very jolly. I and two other fellows laid wagers as to who would walk furthest. I kept it up for a few days, but I had to cave in at last, they were such tremendously strong men.”

In appearance Sydney could not lay much claim to strength. His complexion was as delicate as a girl's, but he looked lithe and active. There was a funny mixture in Sydney of the rough boldness of a boy and the shy politeness of dawning manhood. He looked at his watch now and said,

“ Will the governor be out long ? ”

“ An hour or two yet, I should think.”

“ Then I had better go and put my things straight upstairs.”

“ I did not ask you if you had lunched.”

“ Yes, thanks, I had a lot of sandwiches in the train—three parts dust—and I feel quite satisfied ! ”

Ada laughed.

“ Shall I show you your room ? ”

“ All right. I mean,” he added blushing, “ thank you, if you don’t mind.”

They went upstairs together. Sydney’s was a pretty room looking out on the woods.

“ By Jove, I am in clover here ! I have been accustomed to a bare garret in Dresden. How nice it must be here in the country,” he added, going to the window and looking out.

“ It does not look nice on a day like this. I hate the winter ! ”

“ Oh ! it’s not so bad ; one can ride and skate, and all that sort of thing.”

“ I will leave you now ; you will hear the carriage coming up the avenue.”

“ All right. I shall unpack this little box of rubbish, I believe I have something here for Sylvia.”

Ada was turning away as he spoke, but looked back.

“ Shall I help you ? ” she said.

“ Will you ? Won’t it bother you ? ”

He looked very much as if he would like her to stay. He was in all the newness and bubbling-over-ness of having just returned from a voyage ; full of boyish spirits, ready to chatter and be chattered to.

Ada came back and stood beside him while he opened

a little wooden-box. A funny jumble of things the boy had collected ; bits of rococo jewellery from Frankfort ; carved wood things from Switzerland ; a string of lapis from Mont Blanc. He looked rather proud of his possessions as he turned them over for Ada's inspection.

"I did not know what the mischief to get for the governor," he said, "the only thing I could think of was an inkstand."

He took up one which was remarkably ugly and ponderous. Why is it that the only present one can think of for an oldish man is an inkstand, a penholder, or a blotter, as if all men at a certain age were seized with a mania for writing !

Ada could not admire this offering of Sydney's ; so, not to appear utterly unappreciative, she took up the string of blue lapis and said,

"How pretty the colour is !"

"Do you like them ?" Sydney said quickly ; "would you keep them ?"

She put them down hastily.

"I did not mean that. They are very pretty, but I could not wear them."

Sydney coloured and looked awkward ; he wished he had not offered them to her. Stupid things, of course she did not care for them. Ada half-guessed his thoughts. She did not want to hurt the boy, and he was nice, though Sylvia's brother and her uncle's son ! Why, they were friends already, and she must not be formal with him.

"I'll keep them if I may, and some day I'll wear them."

He looked quite glad. Then sweeping up the other things with his hands, he said,

“ Let us put these in Sylvia’s room. Will you show me the way ? ”

Just as they had left them there, they heard the carriage-wheels.

“ Holloa ! there they are ! ” said Sydney, swinging his weight on the bannisters and going down the stairs two steps at a time, full speed.

Ada went back to her room which overlooked the front of the house. Involuntarily she went to the window and watched Sydney, standing on the steps waving his hand and waiting for the carriage. The cold November wind blew through his curly hair, but did not seem to chill his bright young face.

He lifted Sylvia and carried her in—rather roughly perhaps, for Ada heard her voice more than usually petulant. It made Ada cross ; even supposing he had not been quite gentle enough, why should she complain, it seemed so stupid to spoil the boy’s gladness. Sylvia’s peevishness had brought a little check in Sydney’s buoyancy, but it passed off again.

“ I say, Syl,” he said to his sister as soon as the greetings were over, “ why did you say Ada was ugly ? She is awfully pretty, I think.”

“ Ah ! you’ve seen your cousin,” said Mr. St. George, rubbing his hands, after his cold drive. “ You are quite right, my boy, she is a very well-looking girl.”

“ I cannot perceive it,” Sylvia said in her usual languid way. “ She is too thin ; has a wretched figure and an ill-tempered face.”

“ She looks uncommonly down-in-the-mouth, if that is what you call ill-tempered,” Sydney muttered.

“ How do you all get on together ? ” he added.

“Well enough, when Ada does not give herself the airs of being mistress.”

“Well, it’s her own house, it is natural enough it seems to me.”

Mr. St. George had been silent for a few minutes ; but this was an opportunity not to be lost. What a preposterous notion the boy had got into his head !

“You are ignorant of the particulars of your uncle’s will,” he said, walking over to Sydney with dignity. “Till your cousin is twenty-three, I am master here. I have complete control in this house. Of course it does not matter ; the question of authority is never discussed, but I think it better to set you right.”

Sydney subsided and thrust his hands in his trousers pockets with an air of having had the worst of it.

“Has Mr. Richter given you his account, or is he to send it ?”

“He gave it to me.”

“Not exorbitant, I trust. Those tutors are the devil for running up bills.”

“I’ll give it to you to-night. I am not sure of the exact amount.”

Mr. St. George recognised in Sydney’s unwillingness to tell him, a proof of the account being unpleasantly long ; he frowned.

“You must be uncommonly cautious in your expenditure for the future, master Sydney (in a tone as if this were the first injunction of the kind). When a man is trustee and guardian, there is a tremendous amount of expense entailed upon him.”

“Are you not refunded for all that ?” asked Sydney in astonishment.

“Yes—yes, to a certain extent, but I can’t charge the

estate with every trifle, and a man in my present position must of necessity spend a good deal."

His tone was testy, as if prepared for contradiction, and was by no means pleasant to listen to. Sydney began to think that coming home was not quite so pleasant a thing as he had fancied it; however, he supposed it would be all right by-and-by. The governor was in a bad humour; he would be more amiable after dinner.

"What hour do you dine, father?"

"Seven o'clock, but we don't dress here; you have quite time to wash your hands."

"Oh! yes, your beautiful cousin dresses," Sylvia said scornfully; "that is, she takes off one dingy garb and puts on another."

"Shall I carry you upstairs?" asked her brother.

"Yes, please, but a little more gently than you did just now."

"I'll try," he said as he lifted her up.

The dinner seemed rather dull to Sydney; perhaps it was only because he was not accustomed to it, had forgotten the engaging ways and manners of his family, and had expected something different and more genial.

Sylvia grumbled at the food, laid down her knife and fork, and looked a martyr.

Apropos of some sweetbread that she had rejected with scorn, Ada said,

"I ordered that specially for you, Sylvia; I fancied you liked it."

"You forgot," she answered resignedly, "that I never eat it when it is done in white sauce."

"You should study Sylvia's taste a little more, Ada," Mr. St. George remarked cheerfully; "it will take you more out of yourself to consider others."

"I think it is awfully nice," said Sydney, making a diversion in Ada's favour.

He wondered why the mischief they were all down on the girl.

"You have grown so grand, Silvy, from your London life, that you turn up your nose at everything."

"I must say the cooking at Madame Chartier's was perfect."

Sylvia always became animated on the subject of her London friends.

"What did you do while you were there? You never deigned to write to me."

"I was always occupied. I had music lessons, and we went out a great deal. My friend Madame Chartier could not bear me out of her sight."

"How touching!" said Sydney, with school-boyish mockery in his voice.

Sylvia flushed angrily.

"Quite incomprehensible to you, of course, how any one could like me so much! However, Madame Chartier was not a solitary instance; I was a favourite with all her friends, was invited everywhere; in fact, my life was very different from what it is here! There was such consideration for my delicacy, such studying of my every wish and want."

"Don't get in such a wax," said Sydney in a laughing tone, by no means calculated to soothe her. "Nobody says you were not made much of; it is plain that you were, for you have grown quite fat on it."

Now Sylvia objected to being thought fat, and Sydney knew it.

"Fat! I may look so next Ada, who is a skeleton; but I can't be fat, for I never eat a morsel."

"How do you like being called a skeleton?" asked Sydney, looking timidly at Ada.

"Don't mind at all," she answered, laughing.

After dinner Sylvia dozed on the sofa. Ada began to work. Sidney fidgeted about the room, looking out of the window into the dark or turning over the leaves of a book that lay on the table. At last he sat down shyly close to Ada, and offered to hold a skein of thread she was winding. She accepted and put it over his hands. He tried to begin a conversation and asked her did she ride. He felt somehow at a distance from this cousin of his; she was not like most girls, but she was very nice and he wanted to jump over all preliminaries, and be friends at once.

Ada answered "Yes" about the riding, and straight-way gave a glowing description of her pet Arab; thinking it might interest the boy, and having a vague idea that boys, horses, and dogs had some connecting link.

"Do you think the governor will give me a horse while I am here? It would be jolly to have some rides."

"I don't know," she answered, laughing. "I should think you ought to know best."

"I am sure I can't tell. Too good luck, I suspect."

"If he does not, you can have Vera as often as you like."

"Oh! thanks. Does she jump?"

"Beautifully."

"Can you go across country?"

"Yes. I have done so with papa."

Sydney was silent for a little; he was thinking what

hard lines it was for the poor girl to lose her father. It was the first time he had been brought near to any grief, and was subdued a little by the thought that there was a sadness in Ada's heart which he had not experienced, did not know anything about. He was not sure that he had not been boring her, and that it was not his fault that the conversation had led up to a painful subject.

Clearly, Sydney was not like the rest of the family; had taken his nature, perhaps, from his dead mother, from his dead uncle, from some side of the family which had not communicated its tendencies to Sylvia or her father. The latter had just come in and was standing before the fire watching Ada and his son, with a curious expression on his face: scrowing up his eyes, and looking as if he were doing a very difficult sum in mental arithmetic.

By-and-by Sylvia woke up.

"You need not whisper," she said, "as if some one were ill. I am not asleep. I have been wondering, Sydney, when you would make yourself agreeable, and tell me all you have seen while you were abroad."

"When you ask me to give an account of myself in that sort of way, it all goes out of a fellow's head."

"Of course, any exertion for your sister's pleasure is impossible!"

Another pleasing little family skirmish was impending—but it was cut short by Mr. St. George.

"Sydney, I should like to see those accounts tonight, can you let me have them now?"

"Yes," he answered, getting up

“Leave them in the library.”

So passed the first evening of complete family union! Sydney as he went to bed was still more convinced that coming home was pleasanter to think of at a distance than to realise.

He fell asleep and dreamt that he was on the Alps again, but instead of his tutor, Ada was with him climbing the mountains, and always on before him—and laughing at his slowness.

CHAPTER XXV.

“HIS SENSE ON THE ATTENTIVE BENT.”

THERE was a certain tone of change in the household at Oaklands, after Sydney's return. Mr. St. George was blander, treated his family at dinner-time to dreary remarks, as if he were at a party—remarks of a literary, moral or political nature, which were to impress the listeners with the idea that he was a man who had thought deeply, and deemed it a duty to give his experience to the young; Sylvia ceased to be continuously languid, breaking the monotony by little squabbles with her brother.

Ada was unconsciously drawn from her solitude and reserve; Sydney was always asking her opinion, referring to her, taking her part in trifling family disagreements, and so she could not shut herself out from his society, nor did she wish to, for she liked the boy.

This friendliness and confidence between the two cousins did not increase Sylvia's love for Ada. She frequently made playful feminine remarks, such as,

“I never imagined you could be so pleasant, when I first came; you have come out in quite a new light since Sydney's arrival.”

Any offer of Ada's to be of use to Sylvia, to go with messages, to work for her—though they were frequent enough—was received with an air of astonishment as i

it were a most surprising and unusual attention, and was accepted deprecatingly as though she said, "You see I am an invalid, I am obliged to give trouble."

From time to time Ada tried to get on a better footing with Sylvia; she tried to realise that it must be very dull for her to be forced to lie down so much, and to feel weak and ill; and remembering these things, tried to find excuses for her querulous, disagreeable nature, but it would not do. There seemed no reality about Sylvia; Ada could not even feel that she was truly suffering, and that there was not some affectation, some make-believe about it.

When Sydney first returned, he had the faint hope that his father would give him a horse, but that hope soon died away. Ada lent him her mare *Vera*, but he found it dull to ride alone; he was a sociable lad, and always wanted some one to share his amusements, perhaps rather as an increase of pleasure to himself than as an enjoyment to others. He was one day visited by the brilliant idea of taking his father's harness horse, and thenceforth he managed to have frequent rides with Ada.

The forenoons Ada spent alone in her little sitting-room, a tiny apartment opening into her bed-room. There she was alone, with her books and her thoughts, and no one came to disturb her. These were her happiest hours, though she liked Sydney, and was quite willing to admit that Oaklands was more bearable since his boyish face was to be seen there, his whistle to be heard through the house, or his bright laugh in the depressing presence of Sylvia and Mr. St. George.

During these morning hours Sydney lounged about in an aimless way; went into the stable, and leaning his

back against a stall, talked with an air of immense knowledge to the groom on horsey subjects; then returned to the house, and loitered into the drawing-room, redolent of stable! This being offensive to the nostrils of Sylvia, she would reproach him in a martyr-like way.

“ You know how ill it makes me, and yet you will not change your boots when you’ve been in the stable.”

Then she would put her handkerchief to her nose, and look as if about to faint.

Sydney being accustomed to this, it never made much impression on him; he usually dawdled about a little longer, knocked down two or three things accidentally, made a crackling noise with the newspaper, and having reduced Sylvia’s nerves to a fearful condition—to judge by her exclamations—would go away lazily and change his boots, not being by any means ill-natured, and having meant to do so all along. He would return sometimes with his violin, which instrument he played tolerably well, and would practice with his sister. This practice seldom lasted long, and always terminated in a squabble. They had some dispute about the time, or the way of reading a passage, and Sylvia would not give in, though Sydney on these occasions was invariably in the right, having more knowledge of music.

In these days, Sydney began to look on his father’s and sister’s character more critically than he did in former times. When he had been with them before, he had formed no distinct idea about them; they were his father and sister, aggravating sometimes, but well enough. That they could be loved, respected, admired, or the reverse, apart from their position as father and sister, never entered into his head. Now he found *him*.

self wondering why Sylvia could not be nicer, and grow-
ing impatient at his father's unmeaning speeches.

One morning when Ada had been reading something
which interested her much, and made her thoughtful,
a knock came at her door. When she had said "Come
in," the door opened slowly, and Sydney appeared.

"I say, Ady," he began hesitatingly, "may I come
in?"

"Of course you may."

"Am I disturbing you?" he asked, glancing at the
table, which was strewn with books and papers.

"No! I have done reading now, but what is it? Has
anything important happened?"

"No, nothing particular, only I've been with the
governor all the morning in the library, and I am frozen
in body and mind. I want to know if you'll come out to
ride."

"Sylvia is going to drive, there will be no horse for you."

"What an infernal bother. Oh, I beg your pardon, I
forgot!"

"Was there no fire in the library, that you were
frozen?"

"One red coal and two or three black ones! The
governor has economy on the brain! Why have you
not got a fire?" he added, glancing at the empty grate.

"Your father would think it reckless extravagance."

"Good heavens! what right has he to dictate to you?
He can pitch into me of course if he likes, I am his son,
but I can't see why you should not do as you like.
After all, this is your house."

Things had evidently not gone smoothly in that morn-
ing interview, and Sydney was seeing his father's
character in a stronger light than usual.

“How cross you are, Sydney! What has my uncle been talking to you about?”

“Oh! a lot of things,” he said, tilting his chair back, swinging his foot backwards and forwards, and speaking in a tone as if he would avoid the subject, yet wanting to be questioned and sympathised with all the same.

Ada had been rather put out at first at being disturbed, Sydney’s entrance brought her back to stupid little worries and fusses, and she had been in such a calm atmosphere. However, she had adapted herself to the present state of things by this time, and was ready to talk. Sydney had been at home for some time now, and the cousins were as good friends as if they had been brought up together.

“Tell me some of the things,” said Ada, “if you feel inclined; I dare say they are not so nice that you can’t share them!”

“Well, first of all, I am to go to Oxford next term.”

“You don’t mind that, do you?”

Sydney looked disappointed at her answer.

“It is not exactly that I mind going to Oxford!” he said, taking up a pencil and making figures on a bit of paper beside him.

“I wish *I* could go to Oxford?” said Ada. “It seems so nice to work hard in a beautiful University like that, and learn much in the best way, with the guidance of the cleverest men.”

What was in Sydney’s mind seemed absurd and silly to say now; Ada would only laugh at him. At his age boys are very susceptible of ridicule.

“You are so fond of study, and I am not. But,” he added more eagerly, “would you like me to work hard, and know a great deal?”

“Of course I should. It would be the happiest thing for yourself too.”

“But unless a fellow knows what he is going to be, what’s the good of working? Perhaps he works at just the wrong thing.”

“If you have a thoroughly cultivated mind, I should think you would be fit to take to anything, but has Uncle Henry no particular wish as to your profession?”

“Yes, he has an excellent idea!” he answered sneeringly; “he thinks I might be a clergyman, because there is the gift of a living in the family!”

“But you won’t be?” Ada said quickly.

“Certainly not. I am not over good, but I am blowed if I could turn parson, just for the pounds shillings and pence. Besides,” he added, with a laugh, “to poke about amongst the poor, ugh!”

“Have you no wish about it yourself? Don’t you want to be anything in particular?”

“I should not mind going into the army.”

“I have heard papa say that it is an idle sort of life, unless a man has resources in himself.”

Ada had a kind of elder sister’s feeling about Sydney. She did not want to see him idle and good for nothing, and she fancied, somehow, that his easy-going nature wanted stability.

“I am sure there are few fellows have such a resource as I have in my violin.”

Ada said nothing. Though Sydney had much musical taste, there was an amateurishness about his study which did not promise great results.

Suddenly he said, looking from the books before him to Ada, “If you wanted me not to idle about, why have you not made me work all this time?”

"I? How could I?" she asked with surprise.

"You could have let me come up in the morning and work with you here, instead of dawdling about and putting Sylvia in a rage."

"It is never too late to mend," Ada answered carelessly. She did not quite believe in Sydney's diligence, or I doubt if she would have been so willing to have her quiet morning hours disturbed.

"Will you really let me study with you?" he said gleefully.

"Yes, if you like, but I can't teach you anything, you know far more than I do."

"You can teach me Italian."

"Yes, I can, but what good will it be to you?"

"Oh! there are awfully nice things to read in Italian."

"Yes," she said thoughtfully.

She was regretting rather that Sydney had proposed this plan.

"It seems to me," she said, after a minute or two, "that Uncle Henry had not anything very disagreeable to say this morning, and you have been making a fuss about nothing!"

"It was not only about going to Oxford; he has announced that he is going to put me on a miserable allowance while I am there, which would . . ."

He hesitated for a suitably strong simile and at last took the first that came,—“which would starve a cat!”

Ada laughed at his look of distress.

"I suppose it will prevent your being extravagant."

"That's just what it won't do; when a fellow knows he can't manage he ever so careful, he gets reckless."

"What in the world does he do with his money?" he added energetically.

“Uncle Henry says he never was rich.”

“No, not rich, but he is at no expense living here. Do you remember what yearly sum your father left for keeping up the place?”

“No, certainly not. It is of no consequence to me.”

Sydney looked uncomfortable. It was a stupid question to ask, but it was not exactly curiosity that prompted it. He was silent for a little while.

“I can’t make out the governor,” he said at last.

Ada had nothing to say to this.

“What do you think of him, Ady?”

“I?” She paused, and a comical look came in her face.

“Why do you ask me?”

“Because I want to know. I don’t see why you should not tell me.”

“I do not like him,” she said simply.

“But after all,” said Sydney, feeling called upon to defend him, “he is not so bad; does not fly into fearful rages as some fathers do. What do you dislike about him?”

If Ada had said what was in her mind, she would have said “everything,” but she only answered, “We do not suit each other, that’s all.”

“I used to think him nicer,” Sydney went on as if half-talking to himself. “I do not know if it was from a babyish sort of idea that one must admire one’s father, but he seems different now, more—more—upon my word I don’t know what it is.”

“He is going to cramp your actions by giving you very little money, Sydney; is that the reason he seems changed?”

“No, it is not that,” he said hastily, “though that is hard lines. No, I can’t make out what he means sometimes; he seems to say one thing and mean another.”

Sydney was getting to the root of the matter now. Not simple and truthful. We tacitly acknowledge what our natures are when we are untrue: something unsightly about them that requires covering up. Ada was glad that Sydney saw this dimly, she liked him better for it, but she felt sorry for the boy; to her it would have been intense pain, that discovery of any flaw in one she felt bound to respect.

“He does not think it necessary to explain himself about things, perhaps,” she said, feeling that this was a very weak attempt at palliation.

So their little talk ended. The truth was that Sydney had been brought in close association with a finer nature than any he had yet known, and that his best feelings had sprung to stronger life from the companionship. Unconsciously he compared others with Ada, and in the clear light of her true, brave soul, others grew dwarfed and mean.

After this day Ada had to relinquish the idea of having any time to herself. Under pretence of studying Italian, Sydney invaded her sitting-room day after day. Ada could not easily have resigned herself to this if she had not known that he was going to Oxford so soon; he would be away for months, and after that would have more fixed occupations and would be independent of her. With a great deal of urging on her part, a little slovenly study was got through each day; an exercise badly written, a verb badly learnt, and the more earnest she was about it, the more Sydney laughed and idled. Sometimes he would break off suddenly, and insist on reading to her some fragment of a poem which was a favourite of his. He had a melodious voice and read well. His was a sensitive nature with fine tastes; easily touched was his

tender young heart; reading some pathetic passage his voice would grow choky and his eyes fill with tears. But there was always a surface admiration in his raptures about any fine work; he appreciated the melody, the atmosphere of the thing, but never saw into the soul of it quite, and this would check and disappoint Ada when she had grown a little excited and was ready to share his enthusiasm. She would tell herself then that he was very young; that he would understand better by-and-by, and would reason as if a long stretch of years divided them, when truly she was but little his senior, and the lapse of half a century would not bring them any nearer in feeling.

What did Mr. St. George think of the cousins' friendship? Judging from little trifling words and looks, he did not seem to approve of their intimacy. A slight sneer at Ada's half Italian descent was common with him when the opportunity occurred and when Sydney was present. A timely warning against treacherous Italian natures, and a statement that there was nothing like an honest English girl, was frequent during his walks and talks with his son. He lost no opportunity of telling Sydney that he was a child, a mere child; the reiteration of which information had the curious effect of making him feel quite a man of the world, and that he would prove it to all unbelieving elders ere long. Mr. St. George persisted in holding out to Sydney the prospect of going into the Church.

"You see," he said, "I know the world, my dear boy, and I have the interest of my children always at heart. What can a penniless young man, without over-much brains, do in the world? He can't work up in his profession if he is a doctor or barrister; he can't make his

fortune by a wealthy marriage, because no girl with money would marry a pauper."

To this Sydney objected; it seemed to him that a rich girl ought to marry a poor man, but this objection was received with one of Mr. St. George's smiles—very expressive but indescribable.

"Such a notion is childish," he would say. "Your cousin, for instance, would she marry any one but a dashing young fellow with a lot of money at his back? No, of course not. Well, I look on ahead. In a few years my office as guardian will be at an end. I don't look forward to any continued intercourse with my ward; she is a cold, proud girl, and is not likely to retain any affection for one who has controlled her, and to a certain extent restrained her freedom of action. When Ada is of age, I shall have done my duty, I shall resume my former position—not an affluent one—and it would be a great comfort to me to feel that by that time you were provided for, were in an honourable and independent position as Vicar of Toddington. You might be of use to your cousin too, living close to her; as you seem to get on together, you might give her cousinly advice."

Here the watchful expression would come in Mr. St. George's face, but during such conversations, or rather lectures, as the speech was almost entirely on one side, Sydney's eyes were on the ground; he would shift his position, cross and recross his legs, and look altogether uncomfortable and bored. If he were walking with his father, he would flick at every passing plant with his stick, or kick the gravel up with his foot, and finally get away by looking at his watch and saying that he had to ride, or practise his violin, or, in fact, do anything which took him away from the presence of his father.

The latter never tried to detain him, it was not his rule to force a subject on any one; that, in his idea, was a clumsy mode of working.

From all this we might gather that Mr. St. George wished gently to warn his son against Ada; to check any latent ambition that might be in his young soul, and to lead him to choose a quiet, uneventful life, removed equally from poverty and riches, as the one best for himself and most pleasing to his father. Not hastily, however, could any one conclude what Mr. St. George's real wishes were. Not always did he deem it right or wise to speak what was in his mind plainly and directly. In the people he addressed, he allowed, generally, for some extraordinary moral or mental twist which would misunderstand or misinterpret truth, and most people had therefore to be dealt with as one deals with the insane, viz., with much consideration and management. He failed to recognise, however, that it was dawning faintly on his son that the paternal character was peculiar, and not quite as simple as it had appeared to him in his younger days of childishness and confidence.

CHAPTER XXVI.

“EVEN AS A BROTHER—BUT NO MORE.”

TIME sped by swift-footed. Christmas came, and after a fashion they made merry at Oaklands. Ada and Sydney decorated the house with holly and ivy, though no one admired it but themselves. Sydney took especial pleasure in ornamenting Ada's little sitting-room, spending much time and trouble over it, with a kind of stubborn feeling that if no one else in the house tried to make it cheerful for her, he would. He hung sprigs of mistletoe here and there, to which he laughingly called her attention, but he was far too shy to avail himself of the privilege their presence gave him. Contact with a hard sceptical world had not yet taken the power of worship out of this boy's heart, and his cousin was not merely to him an amusing companion, a nice girl whom he was fond of and glad to be with, but something beautiful, something sacred, something much more perfect than could exist elsewhere.

Sylvia observed, apropos of the decorations, that she did not know what they were sticking those things over the house for; there was no one to see them. Mr. St. George turned a deaf ear to his daughter's suggestions to ask some one to come and stay at Oaklands, as it was fearfully dull. He was very much occupied with Mr. Danvers just now, and had at this time a more than usually strong expression of doing mental arithmetic.

On Christmas Day, Sylvia's love for society was gratified, Mr. Danvers and his two daughters coming to dinner; unfortunately they were not quite the kind of company she desired, and she treated them to her most languid and insolent manner. Ada was forced to make up for Sylvia by being unusually attentive, but it was dreary work, the Misses Danvers being young ladies who can be briefly described by saying that they showed a great deal of shoulder and giggled. Sydney added to the difficulty of Ada's office by getting behind a table, or in any obscure corner of the room, and making hideous grimaces, which caused Ada to wander slightly in the conversation! At last, the doleful Christmas Day came to a close.

Sydney was to go to Oxford in January, and as the time came near, he looked dismal and discontented. He was perpetually with Ada now. On the smallest pretext he disturbed her at her work or reading, and she always brightened when he came into the room, and was ready enough to lay aside her occupation and talk to him or go out with him. She often thought how dreary it would be at Oaklands when he was gone, and was willing to give him pleasure now. Quite as a boy, nay, almost as a child, she treated him, and never saw that his love was growing into something more than a cousinly fondness. Her father's death, and since that the isolation of her life, had seemed to condense into those few months, years of thought and experience, and she felt so much older than Sydney that the possibility of his loving her never occurred to her. A lad's first love may be an awkward and unmanageable sort of thing; in after years we come to look on it as a foolish kind of excitement, lacking dignity and depth, but we sneer at

it ungratefully, perhaps because we know we cannot recall the freshness and purity of our feelings—the first passionate throb of our hearts—as we recognised in ourselves the power of loving; as we felt (as the bird feels in the first beat of its wing) the heights to which we could soar, when the knowledge of good and evil burst upon us, and we knew the power within, which could trample on all base thoughts, and make us nobler and finer than others, for the sake of her we loved; when the first faint sparks of the heroic burnt in us—to be quenched soon enough, God knows—with most of us.

It was the day before Sydney was to leave. He had brought into Ada's room some gloves for her to mend and some handkerchiefs for her to mark; a pretext of course to be with her. While she did this, he sat down by the fire and did not speak; he kicked the coals with his foot and felt miserable.

"I'll miss you so much, Sydney," Ada said after a little while.

"No, you won't," he answered rather sulkily, "everything will go on much the same here; you will not be interrupted in your studies, that's all. There will be no one to bother you."

She looked surprisedly at him; it was not his usual way of speaking.

"I do not know why you dislike going to Oxford so much." Her complete ignorance of the reason, seemed to make it impossible to tell her.

"I dare say I shall like it well enough when I am there."

"You are going to work hard and distinguish yourself?"

"What's the good? To end by being Vicar of Dod-

dington, and pass my life writing inane sermons and humbugging about amongst sick old women !”

Ada laughed at Sydney’s idea of a clergyman’s life. “Your father cannot force you into the Church if you dislike it. If you have energy enough, you can make your own life what you want it to be ; can’t you ?”

“Can I, Ady ?” he said with sudden brightness, “the governor wants to make out that there is no chance for a fellow like me, without money and—as he kindly adds—without brains ; that the best thing he can do is to drop into the first tolerable berth that turns up, and think himself uncommonly lucky if he does not starve !”

“Do you think he means all that ?”

“I don’t know, only I can’t see the fun of his saying what he does not mean.”

“Another thing he says,” he continued, kicking the coals again, but this time in a more restless, nervous way, “is, that if a fellow without tin falls in love with a girl who is rich, there is no use his thinking of marrying her, because she would not be such a fool as to think of him.”

Still Ada did not see what was in the lad’s mind, though his colour came and went and his eyes were on the fire instead of looking at her.

Ada laughed.

“What a funny notion of Uncle Henry’s ! But why should you trouble your head about what your father thinks. You will form your own notions as you live, and see things and think about them.

“But what do you think ?” he persisted, still looking at the fire.

The idea of Sydney discussing the subject of marriage at all seemed ludicrous to Ada.

“Well, if I were a young man,” she said, smiling ;

"let me see, I should not think about falling in love at all, till it happened, and then perhaps she might not be rich."

"But if she were?" he said quickly.

As he spoke Ada handed him some handkerchiefs she had been marking to put near the fire, and she noticed suddenly that he looked excited, and that his eyes were unusually bright. It flashed across her that perhaps he cared for some one really—some girl whom he had met abroad, and that he was going to tell her about it and ask her advice. He liked some one very much, poor boy, and she might be of use, though no one could be of much use in such cases; so she answered more gravely,

"Well, if she were rich, what difference could that make? Don't think about money, Sydney; what is it after all? The bravest and the noblest have been quite poor; and if people come to think about it and love it, they grow so horrible."

He still had his eyes on the fire.

"If you, for instance," she said gently, building up a story in her mind as she went on, about Sydney and this imaginary girl that he loved, "liked any one, and she were rich, surely her riches would not prevent her loving you."

He looked round now for a second, and then returned to his gazing into the coals.

"She might think that I was an adventurer, that I made up to her because she was rich."

"She would be very contemptible if she did, and you would be horrible to think that she thought so, and in fact," Ada added hotly, "whenever the consideration of money enters into any love or any friendship, it is altogether disgusting."

Sydney got up, leant a minute against the chimney-piece, then lounged into a chair by the table quite close to Ada and taking up a pencil, began to make senseless diagrams on a sheet of paper that lay there, while Ada thought of this mythical girl and wondered if she were nice.

“Now you, for instance,” said Sydney, reversing the example. “You could love a poor man?”

“Of course I could,” she answered briskly and cheerfully.

She did not see yet. How dreadfully obtuse she was! There seemed to be a third presence assisting at this conversation—the girl that Sydney was dreaming about—and Ada could not see that this ideal was in her own image.

“You are so nice, so beautiful, so good!” the boy said warmly, looking at her now and then more boldly, but yet with boyish timidity.

“Not at all, other girls are much nicer, I am sure.”

“*Sylvia*, for example?” he said playfully.

There was some time to go by before dinner, he could sit there and talk; he need not say all he wanted at once; there was no hurry.

“No, not *Sylvia*. She is not nice to me.”

Ada took up Sydney’s gloves, and began to mend them.

“But then,” she continued, “*Sylvia* can’t understand, she has had such a different sort of life. I have been spoiled perhaps, and now you see everything is so changed.”

Sydney was altered to-day; there was a touch of pathos in his voice; he was sorry about somebody or something. It seemed natural to talk to him like this; to let him see her sadness and loneliness, and know that

she would be glad to help him; that she was not cold and selfish as Sylvia and her uncle thought, and tried to make Sydney think.

“Yes, I know, Ady; it must be fearfully hard for you to have lost your father and be all alone. I am sure you loved him very much.”

The tears came into her eyes, the first tears that had come in all these months, and her voice was husky as she answered,

“Yes, and what makes my life harder is that I seem of no use to any one, and yet I would help people if I could, and there seems no way to do it. I seem shut up in myself and as if I loved no one.”

All these words would never have come only that she was sorry for Sydney, and wanted him to know that she was quite his friend. It was an outlet to her own feelings too, though the words were not wholly for herself.

“Do you not love *any one*, Ady?” the boy asked, and timidly touched her arm.

She had to stop her work and look at him. Instantly the little romance she had woven vanished! She saw the truth, and hoped she did not see it, for her breath came quickly and she felt so sorry—so sorry that it gave her a great throbbing pain in her heart.

Oh! no, she must be mistaken; and yet—it was love for her that glowed in the boy’s eyes, that changed his whole face so strangely, and made it look older, more earnest, and altogether different from her cousin Sydney’s.

It seemed an hour to Ada, before she found courage to speak. She could not think of anything to say. At last, with a transparent attempt at indifference, she muttered,

“Love any one? Yes,—I don’t know. I am very fond of you and—”

Her voice was not composed. It was a poor effort at passing off the subject lightly.

“You understand, Ady,” he said quickly, “you know that it is you, that it is myself, I have been talking of; that I love you, dear; that you are sweeter, nicer, more beautiful than any one in the world, and that is why I don’t want to go to Oxford, because I can’t leave you, Ady. I can’t.”

He pronounced the last words with a desperate sort of energy. There was still the scared look on Ada’s face, but it was changing to such a stricken, sad expression.

“Sydney dear,” she said, “I—am very fond of you, we are like brother and sister. I have been so much happier since you came, and we shall always love one another, but—”

“But?” he repeated, and there was a sort of demand for fuller words.

She only muttered,

“I am so sorry, so sorry, Sydney dear.”

“You mean?” he said, and then stopped; he began again, and his under lip trembled and seemed beyond his control.

“I am not a handsome fellow, I am not clever, but I love you so, Ady.”

“I am so much older, Sydney,” she objected, “that you ought to think of me as quite an elder sister.”

“What is the good of talking like that? I don’t think of you as a sister at all—I can’t.”

There was a little pause, during which his face flushed and he tore up nervously the paper he had been scribbling on.

"Tell me," he said, and it was sad to see the working of his young face, "can you not love me in another way, not as a brother, but—as I love you?"

"I am afraid not, Sydney."

The worst must be said, she felt.

"Never?"

She had to pause a moment. Not at once could she crush out the hope in his passionate eyes.

"I am afraid not, Sydney."

The mouth twitched still more. Could nothing check the quiver of that under lip? He set his teeth on it. Men don't cry, he thought, and he made a fierce gulp, but it was of no use. His head went down on his arms, and the table shook with his sobs. It was pitiful to see him.

Ada felt like some dreadful culprit, but what could she do but cry too? So the tears fell silently as she looked at him. By-and-by, when he was quiet, she put her hand on his bent head.

"Sydney dear," she said softly.

He looked up at her distressed face, took his arms off the table and said hoarsely,

"What a baby you must think me!"

"No, I don't; you are a dear boy, and I can't bear to have given you pain."

"I suppose men bear these things without wincing."

He seemed to look vaguely out into a world of sorrow that he had never dreamt of before, and there was an older look on his face.

"You won't mind after a while, Sydney; will you? I am so sorry."

She could find nothing more to say than this, and it did no good. She wanted to bring their friendly relation

back to what it was before; she could not bear this state of things at all; not yet had she accepted the pitiless law of change, which never gives back for one brief instant a thought, a word, a look as it was, unflecked by some new light or shade.

“I won’t mind!” he repeated; “if you can think *that*, my father must be right after all.”

“No, no, don’t think so. I am not cold; this hurts me so,” and she laid her hand on her heart with the quick gesture always used by her when much moved. “I would give anything that this had not happened, and I hope that you will forget me and not care about me that’s all.”

“It is not likely; but it does not matter, Ady; don’t fret yourself about it; why should you care for me? I have neither brains, money, nor much good looks.”

“You have plenty of intellect, Sydney, and you know it.”

“I could have worked and done something, perhaps—if things had been different; but now—as my father justly observed—there’s nothing for it but the parsonage.”

He spoke in a hard way, quite new to him; but then pain was new to him, and how it would affect his nature was not yet plain.

He got up to leave the room, but Ada put her hand on his arm and stopped him.

“Sydney,” she said, “I can’t let you go away from me like that, and don’t quote your father; I cannot bear it. You are not like him, and never will be, thank God! Do not look at the ugly side of things because I—because you are bothered and sad. You say you love me, do not make me miserable. Please, please do not look and

“speak in that way.” There was a ringing entreaty in her voice which touched him with an unselfish sorrow, and he made an effort over himself.

“Oh! it will be all right, dear,” he said; “don’t worry yourself. I am a little down on my luck just now, naturally I do not see the bright side of things, but it’s not your fault, I suppose.”

He removed her hand from his arm as he spoke, thrust his hands in his pockets, and went out of the room and down the stairs, making a faint whistling sound, which had no tune in it, and which, if it were meant to express cheerful indifference, was singularly unsuccessful.

Sydney went down the stairs, through the hall, and out. He had seen his father go down the avenue before he went up to Ada, and imagined him to be at Dullstoke with Mr. Danvers, but if Sydney had gone into the library he would have found him there; curiously close to the door too, which was just ajar and made it possible for Mr. St. George to see any passer-by.

“Alone!” he muttered to himself, as he heard Sydney’s step on the stairs. With increased anxiety he watched for his appearance, and after Sydney had passed by and gone out, he was still in the same position, peering into the hall with a puzzled, baffled look on his face. At last he stepped back into the library and resumed his seat at the table, and something like a curse came from between his teeth.

“She has refused the boy from sheer spite and heartlessness,” thought he, folding his papers in a cruel sort of way and putting them aside. “What right had she to hang about the boy and make a fool of him if she did not mean to marry him? I believe she guessed that I would like it, and is at this moment rejoicing at the notion

of my being foiled in my plans! What reason have I given her to dislike me? Hers is a bad nature which cannot be grateful nor tolerate an obligation. I have indulged her in everything; have been like a father to her, but that dark blood of hers is full of scorn and hate!"

Mr. St. George looked enraged, but did not indulge in any violent action; did not even shut the drawer of his secretaire with a bang, which impatient movement might have been a relief to most men. No, he closed it quietly, locking it with deliberation, and then looked round the room, his face growing more fixed and calculating.

Four years; well, there was time for change of feeling. Life should not be made so delightful to her here that she could afford to despise Sydney's love. Why should he study to please her, she did not make much effort for others? Sydney was much too good for her; he was throwing himself away on a hard, obstinate girl, but since the boy had got this notion into his head, why he—his father—would help him. He always had the interest of his children at heart and planned for them, not for himself. Thank heaven, he was not a selfish man! This niece of his? She was not likely to have many admirers here; (a slight smile came on his face) her head would not be turned by the number of her worshippers, and by-and-by perhaps she would have sense. 'Quand on n'a pas ce que l'on aime, il faut aimer ce que l'on a.'

With these reassuring reflections, Mr. St. George got up, took his hat from the peg in the hall and went out.

Just before dinner, father and son came in arm-in-arm. Sydney's manner was changed a little that evening; less boyish; a kind of careless indifference and readiness in it which did not seem natural. Ada looked miserable,

and kept glancing towards him in a frightened way. As the evening wore on she told herself very often that he would not mind after a while; that in his life at Oxford he would find new thoughts and new friends, and that this first little sorrow would fall off from him and be forgotten. They did not speak to each other at first; were shy of one another, and could not make trifling remarks with the same freedom as usual, but Ada tried to get him to look at her and speak to her, and succeeded at last; the awkwardness seemed passed and she was glad.

No one, looking at Mr. St. George and listening to him talking about Oxford, about Sydney's return, about buying a horse for him that he might ride more frequently with his cousin, would have suspected that he had gained any knowledge through the chink of the library door, or that for an instant his temper had been ruffled.

When they all stood on the hall-door steps, seeing Sydney off next day, Ada felt brighter; she was growing more sure that all would be well with Sydney; that she had not hurt him very much, and she waved her handkerchief almost gaily as he drove down the avenue, and thought of his return and how he would drop back into his old cousinly place, and they would be happy together again.

END OF VOL. I.

